

# **Jehovah's Witnesses and the Catholic Church**

Five Lectures by John Francis Coffey:

1. After Jehovah's Witnesses—What?
2. The Testimony of History for the Catholic Church
3. The Catholic Church and the Papacy
4. The Catholic Church and the Bible
5. Examining the Catholic Doctrines of Purgatory, the Eucharist, and the Virgin Mary

## INTRODUCTION

AFTER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - WHAT? was developed from a talk given in November 1988. It has since been revised and enlarged, and is available on audio cassette. Except for a few minor revisions this printed version is identical to the text of the audio version.

This series of cassettes deals with subjects so sensitive that it is almost impossible to discuss them calmly and dispassionately. The issues are highly emotional and fueled by centuries of hostility and ill-will; and even now, we are still no nearer to agreement than we were when the matters were first raised.

But, I present them here - perhaps for the first time on a teaching cassette - for the purpose of re-opening discussions on these vital issues, and, offering a challenge to Christians everywhere, who have never heard a presentation of these Catholic teachings, to listen carefully to what I have to say - and then make their decision.

Part of the problem I face, and I will discuss it more fully a little later, is that talks such as this inevitability reach a larger audience than was actually intended. What happens then is that arguments I use to counter Jehovah's Witnesses are seen by other Christians as constituting a personal attack on their particular denomination.

As I will declare again and again during the course of these cassettes, it is not my purpose or intention to include other Christians in my presentation. As I try to point out in these talks, many of the arguments Jehovah's Witnesses use to deny Catholic teachings are identical to those used by mainline Protestants who have serious reservations with many doctrines that seem to be exclusively Catholic in character. When I attempt to answer Jehovah's Witnesses' objections, I am, in effect, including certain Protestant groups in my

argumentation. This is unavoidable, and all I can say is that it is not intended.

The questions are addressed primarily to Jehovah's Witnesses, but they are more far-reaching than that, for they are very much alive in Catholic/Protestant debates, where they seem to bring out the worst in us.

The doctrines are fiercely controversial and emotional, but I am not presenting them in a spirit of controversy. As I mention later in these talks, I am not seeking to re-open old wounds, but to clear the air by clarifying points of doctrine, and to give a concise exposition of the Catholic teachings I am discussing. I would like to leave the way open for more serious dialogue, where certain points could be examined further.

I am not a spokesman for the Catholic Church, nor do I have any standing in the Catholic Church. I speak as an ordinary Catholic with very personal views. I endeavor to present Catholic doctrines in an orderly and orthodox manner, that are totally in conformity with current Catholic teachings.

The challenge I make, is that a person listening to this presentation might approach it with an open mind and be prepared to give it a fair hearing. At the end of the tape I give my name, address, and telephone number, for anyone wishing further information, or for criticism, suggestions, or comments.

Shalom.

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

AFTER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - WHAT?

BY

JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

FOREWORD.

Testimony of faith and a brief explanation of why and how I became interested in Jehovah's Witnesses.

Greetings! Before I start my talk, I would like to take the opportunity to say a few words as to why and how I became interested in Jehovah's Witnesses, and why I am now giving this series of talks on the Witnesses and the Catholic Church.

It was in 1956, the year I was married, that the Witnesses first came to my attention. I had heard of them prior to that, for every now and then they made the news because of some incident that had sparked public interest. It was only a decade after the Second World War, and they were still very much remembered for their pacifistic views.

I was born and raised a Catholic. My future wife, Nancy, had only recently converted to Catholicism, and in mid-1956 we were preparing for our wedding which was set for September of that year. It was planned that her brother, Frank, would be best man at the wedding - this had been agreed to for months.

Shortly before the wedding took place, my future father-in-law mentioned in passing that his son had "gone religious," an expression that seemed to imply something sinister.

The word was that Frank had been listening to a friend at work, and had somehow come under his influence. Frank wasn't talking too much, and it was not until much later that I understood why. Until a prospective Witness was hooked on Watchtower doctrine, they were encouraged not to be too open in proclaiming their new-found faith.

Just a few weeks before the wedding was to take place,

Frank came out and said quite openly that he no longer wished to be best man at the wedding. He still failed to explain the change of mind, and I was too naive in matters of religion to ask why.

It was not until a month or two after the wedding that he visited us, and for the first time he explained the change that had taken place within him. He told us how Christianity had fallen into apostasy soon after the death of the last apostle, and how it was not until the late 19th century that true Christianity had re-emerged in what was to become Jehovah's Witnesses.

Over the next few years he continued to witness to the Watchtower's teachings, and never tired of trying to show me where "Christendom," as he called it, had distorted the true Word of God.

Our talks were not all one-sided. Without knowing it, I was being brought to carry out the words of the apostle, Peter, when he urged us to be always ready to give an account of the hope that is in us. (1 Pet 3:15) I realized that my understanding of the faith delivered to the saints, (Jude 3) had not advanced with my age. I began to look for answers to the constant barrage of questions, and in obtaining these answers, I was brought to a deeper understanding of my own beliefs.

I gradually got away from polemics - the endless wrangling over doctrine - and reached a much more mature outlook on Christian teachings. That's not to say I no longer entered into debates with Jehovah's Witnesses and others who have come

my way. Religion is the most important reality in my life. Everything I do, and everything I say is influenced by what I believe. I try to consider all my actions beforehand, and to keep a curb on my tongue, so that nothing I do or say will dishonor Christ. This is not to say that I am always successful, but, with the help of God, I am able to partly obtain my goal.

By the late 1960's my growth in understanding of the Christian faith, and my on-going study in the teachings of the Watchtower, had led me to keep notes on what I was learning, and I began to collect these notes into some sort of order. By 1970, they had expanded into chapters, and I was already thinking of them in terms of a book.

My original intention was to build the book around major Christian doctrines, as this was the manner in which my discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses had developed. I had become very interested in the Witnesses. I attended their Kingdom Halls and their conventions, and I had continuous, sometimes fruitful discussions with them on all points of doctrine.

The Jesuit scholar, the late Reverend John Phillips, whose own association with the Witnesses went back to the mid-1930's when he was a young priest in England, was kind enough to look over my manuscript and offer helpful suggestions to improve it and prepare it for publication.

The title of the book: **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES** was based on the text from Galatians 1:6, which speaks of those who go after a different Gospel. I applied this to Jehovah's Witnesses, who had indeed gone after a different Gospel which has no relation to any doctrines ever

taught at any time by the Christian Church.

The book appeared in 1979, and in the Preface I indicated that the book had been shortened by some 30,000 words. This was partly due to limitations on size, but also it was to give the book a wider appeal. Three full chapters that dealt with purely Catholic doctrines were deleted, and the Witnesses' teachings on WAR and the BLOOD TRANSFUSION issues were drastically condensed into a small Appendix.

In this way, what we finished up with, was a book that answered the Witnesses' objections, and at the same time, became a powerful statement on essential Christianity.

I'll have a bit more to say on the deleted portions of my manuscript in Tape Five of this series of talks, as they form the basis for the **THREE DOCTRINES** I discuss in that particular talk.

And now, to the subject of this talk. The overall title to this series of talks is **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**. It is not a comparison exercise between Jehovah's Witnesses and Catholicism. Nor is it purely a defense for Catholicism. I prefer to see it in the sense in which the 2nd century apologists presented the Christian faith to non-Christians. They were not **apologizing** for Christianity in the way in which we use the word today. They were presenting a **case** for Christianity the same way in which the apostle Paul spoke out to the Athenians in the Acts of the Apostles, (Acts 17:22) when he delivered a reasoned recommendation for the Christian way of life as against the pagan practices that had grown up in their midst.

During the course of this series of talks I will have need to quote from these 2nd and 3rd century apologists quite frequently, so the names Justin Martyr, Ignatius, Irenaeus and others will become very familiar. So my **apology** for Catholicism is an attempt to present Catholicism as an alternative, not only to that of Jehovah's Witnesses, but also to other forms of Christianity that are flourishing today. I will insist that what I am saying is not to be seen as an attack on individuals, or on what they believe. What I want to do is to show that Catholicism stands out in contrast to other forms of Christianity in that its beliefs and practices can be traced back all the way to Christ and his apostles, and as such, need to be given **serious** consideration before they are condemned out of hand.

So even if you only continue to listen to this talk in order to criticize it, then by all means do so. At the end of the talk I give my name and address in order to receive criticism and comments, and I will be only too pleased to answer any objections to what I have to say.

While these talks are predominately directed to ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, or to those who may be on the way out of the Watchtower empire, or to those who may still be loyal to the Watchtower but at the same time feel that all is not quite right in the Watchtower Society, they are an open invitation for other Christians to hear the case for Catholicism, presented to them, perhaps for the first time, so that they may see that it is not the bogey they have been led to believe, but more akin to the beautiful description given in the Letter to the Hebrews, where we read:

You have not drawn near to an untouchable mountain and a blazing fire, nor gloomy darkness and storm and trumpet blast, nor a voice speaking words such that those who heard begged that they be not addressed to them, for they could not bear to hear the command . . . No, you have drawn near to Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to myriads of angels in festal gathering, to the assembly of the first-born enrolled in heaven, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood which speaks more eloquently than that of Abel. (Heb 12:18-24)

This is the Church I am speaking about - the Catholic Church - not some vague, impersonal, or nebulous "Christian Church" which is sometimes spoken of in the sense of a universal church embracing all those who glory in the name of Jesus. Such an image is not the Church of Christ. The Church Christ founded was never meant to be split into hundreds of conflicting sects, each going its own way and doing its own thing.

Jesus told his apostles: "You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Where is the witness to Christ in Christianity today? Where is the oneness - the unity which Jesus prayed for at the Last Supper? (Jn 17:21)

This was a unity so unique and profound that he asked the Father to let it be like the oneness that existed between himself and the Father. So how can we speak of an idealistic community of believers as pleasing to God when they cannot even agree on some of the most basic of beliefs?

There are some who would argue that because we are more united than divided, the peripheral differences are not all that important. But this is not unity. It is certainly not the unity Jesus prayed for. And when a person leaves the Witnesses, or any one of the many other cults that are thriving today, these differences stand out like beacons, and the ex-Witness is faced with the daunting question: "Which church?"

In the Preface to my book **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**, I stated that I had not hesitated to speak of the "Christian Church" and the "Christian Faith" when comparing the doctrinal differences that exist between them and the Jehovah's Witnesses, and that because there is but "one Lord, one faith, one baptism," (Eph 4:5) then to a greater or lesser extent, all who are truly baptized must belong to that one Church founded by Christ. But I also said that if they are in the House of God, then they must continue to strive for that unity of mind and heart that brothers and sisters in Christ should have. (Eph 4:3, 13)

When one leaves the Witnesses, one becomes interested in specifics, and the question: "Which church?" takes on a whole new meaning.

Are we talking about the "Christian church," which is a generalized way of lumping together all the churches that claim to follow Christ? Or the Protestant Church, which embraces so much diversity? Or the Catholic Church, which somehow manages to stand apart from other churches and resists all efforts to make it conform to a set of general principles?

There are so many claimants to the Church Christ

founded, that the resulting confusion is one of the major causes why people fall easy prey to Jehovah's Witnesses and other door-knocking religions.

We are told in First Corinthians 14:33 that God is not a God of confusion, but of peace. Disunity among the churches is not the answer to Christ's prayer; (Jn 17:20-26) nor has his prayer failed to be answered.

I would like to show that Christ's prayer has been answered. That it was answered in the First Century, the Second Century, the Third Century, and the Twentieth Century. That it has been answered in **every** century since the time of Christ and his apostles, and is still being answered today.

This is not bragging, nor is it thumbing one's nose at other churches and adopting a contemptuous attitude of righteousness. It is an attempt to show that the claims of the Catholic Church, which is the subject of this particular talk, and which I believe is the Church founded by Christ nearly two thousand years ago, are not unreasonable, nor arrogant. Nor has the Catholic Church anything to fear from honest examination. With nearly two thousand years of history behind it, it is not hard to find quite a few skeletons in the closet, and scandals that have rocked the Church to its very foundations.

But, the Church is still standing, and still growing, despite the prophecies of doom from its critics. In this series of talks I hope to show the reasons for its continued growth, and, at the same time, answer some of the charges that are leveled against the Church from all sides.

All too often the charge of autocracy is leveled against the Catholic Church, and sometimes, not without reason. But the fact is, that in no other area is the Church so misunderstood, not only by its critics, but even by its own members.

When one looks at a history of salvation in the Catholic Church, it is not hard to see how such an impression has developed. But what I have to do is to put this understanding in perspective, to show how it was understood in the past, and what the Church teaches today.

The first thing I have to say that it is not the Church's teaching that has changed, but rather our own understanding and outlook. There is much less of a defensive attitude than there was in the past; and as recently as forty or fifty years ago, the **general opinion** was that no one outside the Catholic Church could be saved. I say "general opinion," as I not speaking of the Church's **official** teaching, but rather an ingrained belief in the minds of many Catholics that this **was** the official teaching.

One hundred years ago a popular source of informative learning for Catholics was a one volume book called **THE TREASURY OF CATHOLIC DOCTRINE**, which was published in the U.S.A. in 1897. One of the articles covered the "Grounds of the Catholic Doctrine," contained in the Profession of Faith of Pope Pius IV. A question was asked: "May not persons be saved in any religion?" The Pope's answer was (and I quote selectively):

No, certainly; St Paul tells us (Heb 2:6) that 'without faith it is impossible to please God.' St Peter assures us, (Acts 4:12) that 'there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we may be saved, but by the name of Jesus . . . So that it

is manifest from the Holy Scripture, that true faith is necessary to salvation. Now true faith, in order to please God and save our souls must be entire. That is to say, we must believe without exception all such articles as are revealed by God and proposed by his Church to be believed; and he who voluntarily and obstinately disbelieveth any one of these articles, is no less void of true saving faith than he who disbelieves them all. (p. 203)

Another question sought an opinion on "those whose conscience persuaded them that they were [already] in the true Church." The Pope's answer was one that became a catchword in the following years, and even today, is still used by many Catholics to answer this question:

If this error proceeds from **invincible ignorance**, they may be excused from the sin of heresy; provided that, in the sincere disposition of their hearts, they would gladly embrace the truth, if they could find it out. (p. 203)

Some forty years later, another pope, Pope Pius XII wrote his famous Encyclical Letter on the **MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST**, in which he explained that the "true Church of Christ" was the "Holy, Catholic, Apostolic, Roman Church," and further on, he wrote: "It is therefore a dangerous error to hold that one can adhere to Christ as head of the Church without loyal allegiance to his Vicar on earth." (Para. 39)

Eight years later the same pope wrote in another encyclical letter, **CONCERNING MODERN ERRORS**, that "The Mystical

Body of Christ and the Catholic Church in communion with Rome are one and the same thing, and is a doctrine based on revealed truth." (Para. 27)

It is with these pronouncements in mind that certain Catholic **traditionalists** still cling to the past, and are more concerned with keeping alive the sense of the exclusiveness of the Catholic Church than they are in seeking to discover what Christ is saying in the Church today.

And what Christ is saying today is that while he has established his Church to be the **ordinary** means for salvation, he does not reject any good that is found in other churches.

Now this is not a contradiction in the Church's teaching, but a deeper insight into the mercy of God and his Plan of Salvation for all mankind. And this unique development had its beginning with an announcement of Pope John XXIII, in 1959, that he intended to convene an Ecumenical Council. On October 11, 1962, an event began which was to cause a tremendous upheaval in the Catholic Church. That date marked the start of the Second Vatican Council, the 21st Ecumenical or General Council of the Church. From that time on, the Catholic Church would never be the same again.

In convening the Council, Pope John stated that the windows were to be opened so that a breath of fresh air could revitalize the Church and usher in a new Pentecost.

Pope John's vision of the Council has been fulfilled far beyond what he ever dreamed, and the Catholic Church has been transformed in such a way that many of its members no longer believe it is the same Church.

What was once so staid and comfortable to the masses, became a bewildering kaleidoscope of change that shook the Church to its very foundations. And even today, some thirty years

later, the changes are still taking place as the Holy Spirit continues the work of renewal begun by the Council Fathers.

The Second Vatican Council had much to say on the Church as the means of salvation, and in the document called **THE DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH**, the Council statement revealed a tremendous development in the Church's self-understanding, and in the way in which it viewed non-Christian religions. The document states, in part:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his Church, yet sincerely seek God, and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.

Nor does Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those, who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace.

Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She regards such qualities as given by him who enlightens all that they may finally have life. (para. 16)

This development also embraces all non-Catholic Christian churches, and again and again the Council Fathers

focused on these "sister churches."

No matter what individual Catholics or groups of Catholics may seek to deny, the fact remains that Vatican Two clearly teaches that "all men" - that is all people, the whole human race - "are called to one and the same goal, namely, God himself." (**CONSTITUTION OF THE CHURCH**, para. 24)

Just a year before the Second Vatican Council concluded on December 8, 1965, Pope Pius VI wrote his first Encyclical Letter on **THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD**, and stated quite clearly that:

The Church does not regard God's mercy as an exclusive privilege, nor does the greatness of the privilege it enjoys make it feel unconcerned for those who do not share it. On the contrary, it finds its own salvation an argument for showing more concern and more love for those who live close at hand, or to whom it can go in its endeavor to make all alike share the blessing of salvation. (Para. 63)

There are Catholics today who reject this approach and seek a return to the exclusiveness of the past where everyone outside the Church was regarded as being on the losing side. However, since Vatican Two, there is no losing side. The Council Fathers specifically mentioned the followers of non-Christian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and stated that they were not without a means of attaining salvation. Speaking on these religions, the Council declared:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high

regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims, and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. . . . The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussions with members of other religions. (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, para. 2)

When it comes to the followers of non-Catholic Christian religions, the Council Fathers also had much to say. In the decree on Ecumenism, the Fathers urged "All the Catholic faithful to recognize the signs of the times and to participate skillfully in the work of ecumenism." (Para. 4)

Participating in the "work of ecumenism" is the same as working for unity, and the Fathers were acutely conscious of their role in this regard.

Unity is far from a reality, and may not be achieved in our own lifetime. But there must be signs that we are striving for it. And, as the Council document declares:

The result will be that, little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesiastical communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist, into that unity of the one and only Church which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, **dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose**, and we hope that it will continue to

increase until the end of time. (Para. 4)

The wording of the document states that the unique unity between Christ and his Church already "dwells" or "subsists" in the Catholic Church as something which can never be lost; and with this one statement we are immediately thrown back into that pre-Vatican Two period which highlighted the emphasis that Catholics were accustomed to put on the "oneness" that stood their Church apart from all other churches.

From the Council's wording, it would appear that the unity of Christ and his Church which is embodied in the Catholic Church always remains intact, and that other churches which are not in communion with the Catholic Church are in schism **from** it.

Although these other churches may lack the fullness of grace and truth which exists in the Catholic Church, they are not to be regarded as of no importance in God's Plan of Salvation. The Decree on Ecumenism also states that non-Catholics today are not to be blamed for schisms that occurred centuries ago. As the document reveals, men of "both sides were to blame." The Decree goes on to say:

One cannot impute the sin of separation to those who at present are born into these communities and are instilled therein with Christ's faith. The Catholic Church accepts them with respect and affection as brothers. For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are brought into a certain, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.

And even more forcefully, the same paragraph continues:

Undoubtedly, the differences that exist in varying degrees between them and the Catholic Church - whether in doctrine and sometimes in discipline, or concerning the structure of the Church - do indeed create many and sometimes serious obstacles to full ecclesiastical communion. These the ecumenical movement is striving to overcome. Nevertheless, all those justified by faith through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian, and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church. (Para. 3)

To emphasize again what I said a little earlier, the Catholic Church does not regard other churches as second-class institutions; or see itself as superior to them in God's Plan of Salvation. Whatever was said in the past; whatever was done in the past, should be permitted to be buried in the past, as the Church sincerely strives to correct past mistakes and heal old wounds. But no matter what course of action it takes; no matter how sincere its efforts to bridge the barriers that still stand between the churches, there will always be some who will believe that there is some **ulterior motive** behind any Catholic attempt at re-approachment.

There are many who honestly believe that there is nothing good to be found in the Catholic Church, and that it should be shunned by all true believers in Christ. Against this form of invincible ignorance there is no defense. The Catholic Church has got nothing in common with the image of Catholicism that ill-informed persons outside the Church prefer

to present to the world as the Catholic religion. And yet, this caricature is never seen for what it really is. There is no desire to find the truth, and people in this situation prefer to believe the distorted images that the enemies of the Church present to them.

All that can be said of this attitude is to liken it to the words of Jesus in his parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The Rich Man implored Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn the members of his family who were still alive to mend their ways. Abraham reminded him that they had Moses and the prophets to guide them. And Abraham concluded that they "would not be convinced, even if one should rise from the dead." (Lk 16:19-31)

It is this same obstinacy that prevents so many Christians from accepting anything positive about the Catholic Church.

One of the most vocal critics is the Jehovah's Witnesses, and strangely enough, most of their criticisms are not unlike those of Protestantism's. So from time to time it will be noted that I have drawn from Protestant sources to show a **similarity of thinking** when it comes to attacking the Catholic Church.

I repeat again, that these criticisms come mainly from the more extreme forms of Protestantism; and my remarks, while answering the Watchtower's accusations, are also directed to Fundamentalist forms of Protestantism which insist on keeping alive the spirit of the Reformation.

I am not attacking individuals, nor are these talks

meant to be an attack on any particular denomination. I am not implying or saying that a particular denomination is in error, or that it is to be equated with the Watchtower. I am put into the unenviable position of seeking to answer the Watchtower's errors and false accusations, and in doing so, I find it necessary to show that it is not only the Watchtower that denies a particular doctrine, but also some of the more orthodox forms of Christianity.

To illustrate my point, I need only mention such doctrines as the Eucharist, Purgatory, or Papal Infallibility, and one can immediately see that these teachings are as much disputed by the majority of Protestants as they are by Jehovah's Witnesses. And when one begins to look at the objections to these doctrines, it is not hard to see the similarity in the arguments that both groups use to justify their denial of these teachings.

Under these circumstances, I am forced to answer certain objections on a double front, and that is where the animosity begins to creep in, when people regard my remarks as being too personal, and imagine that I am attacking their beliefs under the guise of refuting the Witnesses.

However, this is not my way, and it is not my style, and it is certainly not my intention. As I mentioned in the Introduction to this talk, it is not my intention to include other Christians in this presentation. I try to have charity to all, and if my remarks are offensive to other Christians who see themselves as the object of my criticism, all I can ask is that they follow what I have to say with a little more attention. I have made every effort to point out that my remarks are directed **solely** at the Watchtower, and that other remarks pertaining to Protestantism are simply comparisons I have used

to highlight a point I am making.

This particular talk is titled, AFTER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - WHAT?, and it was from this question that this whole series of talks developed.

It has been pointed out that the Witnesses appear to be losing ground. Their numbers are growing; but, as one ex-Witness remarked, what we are looking at is a revolving door. The numbers going in might be increasing, but so too are the numbers of those coming out. While the latter may fall far short of tipping the balance, the signs still point to the fact that all is not well in Watchtower-land.

Questions are being asked, and are not receiving satisfactory answers. Witnesses are looking closely at Watchtower doctrines and are having difficulty in reconciling them with the Scriptures. This leads to some of them seeking to find these answers outside of the Watchtower, and that is the first step in breaking the chains that have held some of them captive for twenty, thirty, or even forty years and more.

Another ex-Witness stated that leaving the Watchtower was one of the most difficult decisions he ever had to make. For after all, what can one do when almost the whole of one's life has been dedicated to disseminating Watchtower literature? Schooling was minimal, and there was never any time to learn a trade. Spreading Watchtower doctrine had become a full-time occupation, and when it was finally realized that the Watchtower was not the "Faithful and Wise Servant" of the Scriptures, (Mt 24:45) all that was left was a void that could not be filled.

Witnesses who have left the Watchtower's influence

usually look for something to take its place, for the Watchtower had been the center of their lives. It had dominated their thinking, their hopes, their ambitions, and even their relationships. For many Witnesses it had been their life, and it never occurred to them that it could ever be wrong. For some Witnesses, the shock of discovering that the organization to which they had dedicated their lives was false, is too much for them and they end up as agnostics; or worse, as atheists - their faith in God, and in men is shattered.

After a period of re-adjustment, other ex-Witnesses once again begin to look for God. For some of them, traditional Christianity is seen in a new light, and the way is open for the Gospel message to be received.

I have always found the Witnesses to be very sincere. They could hardly be otherwise, for few religions make so many demands upon their members. They are sincere in their beliefs, and they are sincere in their hopes. It could be said that they live in hope, and that it is this hope that keeps them going. Outsiders may see it as a deceptive hope, but it has been powerful enough to sustain the Witnesses for over one hundred years.

But sincerity is not enough. The willingness to devote countless hours each week in door to door evangelizing; the readiness to suffer persecution for commitment to one's beliefs; and even, as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, to accepting the possible death of a loved one as an alternative to permitting a blood transfusion, for example, is not unique to the Witnesses. Their total dedication to their religious beliefs is often matched and even far surpassed by people who are not even Christian at all. There are countless non-Christian people who are dedicated to their beliefs to the point of fanaticism,

and are quite prepared to sacrifice their whole family to achieve their goals.

So sincerity is not a guide to the truth or otherwise of a person's beliefs. There must be other criteria for judging the truth of a particular religion, and the method of judgment must be trustworthy and reliable.

Christianity stands out among the world's religions because it is a revealed, not an invented, religion. This revelation was first conveyed to the people of Old Testament times through the patriarchs and the prophets. In later times, God gave us his final revelation in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

This revelation of God is definitive. It has not been given to us to reform it or correct it to what we think it might be saying; nor are we free to alter it to suit our own whims or fancies. However, God's Word is living and active, and through the agency of the Scriptures and Tradition, there is a body that can and does authoritatively interpret this Word to make it more meaningful to our lives.

Being definitive, God's revelation had to be given to us in a way that precluded any doubt or uncertainty. The revelation had to be safeguarded from those who would alter it or destroy it; and at the same time there had to be a means for truth-seeking people to be able to find it. So the guardian and defender of this revelation must be a visible sign to everyone. And this visible sign is Christ's Church, which he - not human beings - established as the "pillar and foundation of truth." (1 Tim 3:15)

The Church is in the world. It was founded by Christ and built on him, so it still exists today. What we have to do is find it. We have to be able to distinguish it from the

countless claimants which have been set up as the true Church.

When I first began preparing for this series of talks I had already listened to over 130 testimonies of former Witnesses who had left the Watchtower and found new freedom in a Christian church. But listening to these testimonies, I was dismayed to hear how some of these ex-Witnesses had chosen a particular church in which to put their trust.

So many of them based their conversion on a religious experience and then simply drove around their neighborhoods Sunday after Sunday, listening to, and observing the way in which the Gospel message was presented. And when they found a church in which they were "comfortable," they made it their own. In so many of these testimonies, there was never a mention of doctrine; never a mention of history; never a mention of apostolic succession - of tracing the roots of a particular Church back to Christ and his apostles. Never a mention of sacraments, whereby a Christian who is properly disposed, receives and shares in the divine life of Christ. Never a mention of so many things that Christians in the early Church took for granted. As long as there was prominence given to the Bible, and the preaching sounded right, then it was accepted. But this process of selection and elimination is a most unreliable guide, and there needs to be much more care and thought given to this most important decision.

The majority of Witnesses, at least in the Western world, were nominally Christian before they came under the Watchtower's influence. The Watchtower offered them that elusive "something" that had not been found in their own churches, and when the spell of the Watchtower was broken, and they realized that that "something" was not to be found in the Watchtower Society, there was the need to replace it with what was regarded

as more normative Christianity.

In my discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, I always let them know at the outset that I am a Catholic, and then wait to see what line of attack they will follow. Nowadays, of course, this line of attack is set out for them in the 1985 handbook, **REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, and it is interesting to see just how closely they follow the guide-lines presented in this book, and other recommendations the Watchtower has suggested in the past.

During the course of one conversation I informed my visitors that I was in the habit of attending church every day. One of them rather threw me off balance when he replied that he had been a former Catholic and that he too had attended church daily.

I found it rather difficult to accept that anyone so committed could be so easily influenced by the Watchtower's teachings. But probing further, I learnt that "daily" should rather have been "regularly"; and still further probing revealed that "regularly" would have been better expressed as "weekly," or, "nearly every week." There was no conscious attempt to deceive me. I feel that the Jehovah's Witness was reaching back into his past and had a remembrance of "regular" attendance at church, but was somewhat hazy as to the actual frequency.

I think it is difficult, if not impossible, for a

non-Witness to appreciate the trauma a person coming out of the Watchtower has to face. They are in the unenviable position of being ostracized by the Watchtower Society; they are shunned by former so-called friends in their Watchtower congregation; and they suffer the humiliation of having to deny everything that was once so dear to them.

They had proclaimed to the world, by witnessing to all and sundry, that they had the "truth." Their's was utter conviction that the years they had spent in Watchtower activities was preparing them for their place in the earthly paradise that was soon to be established. In spite of opposition from all quarters, they cast off all family ties. They suffered ridicule, loss of friends and relatives. They sacrificed job promotion, they even renounced allegiance to their country, and staked their life on Watchtower promises. And now, after years of testifying to their convictions, they have to do a complete about-face and justify not only to themselves, but to their families and their friends, their relatives and their acquaintances, that what they had previously professed as inalienable truth, is, in fact, false.

No matter what course they may take in years to come; no matter if they **do** find the truth, passing it on will always be that much more difficult.

Sincerity will never be enough. There will always be that lack of credibility. Like the apostle Paul, as recorded in Acts 9, they will find that their efforts to spread the Good News among their former acquaintances will be looked upon with suspicion. How does one go about convincing one's family and friends that they **now** have the truth. All the arguments they use, they have used before, and with much more effect. Now they have to start all over again. But then, in the words of

Jesus, preaching the Gospel was never intended to be easy. He tells us that if we are persecuted in one town we are to flee to another. (Mt 10:23)

We now come back to the question I used as the title to this talk: **AFTER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - WHAT?** I mentioned that an ex-Witness who was sincere in seeking the truth **as a Witness**, will endeavor to fill the void left by their departure from the Watchtower Society. Their world has been turned upside down. There **is** truth out there somewhere, but how does one go about finding it?

They have been burnt once. They staked everything they had on promises that failed to find fulfillment. They had sought the truth, and had found a lie. This time they will be more wary. They can still be persuaded to accept the first thing that comes along, or, they can step back and carefully examine all the claims of each denomination that presents itself to their scrutiny. Perhaps the last thing they would do would be to examine the claims of the Catholic Church. And it is not hard to see why.

When we look at Watchtower publications no other church has received such condemnation from the Witnesses. In their **PUBLICATIONS INDEX** for the years 1930 - 1985, 13 pages are needed to cover the topic of the Catholic Church. This is equal to the number of pages needed to cover the references to Jehovah's Witnesses themselves. Only 8 pages are required to cover the name Jesus, and another 8 pages for the name Jehovah.

From its very beginning, the Watchtower Society has vehemently denounced the Catholic Church in so many ways that

it is almost impossible to even begin to list them.

More than one hundred years ago, the Watchtower founder, Charles Taze Russell, described the Roman Church as "Antichrist." In fact, he depicted it as:

The chief and greatest of these systems is the great 'Mystery of Iniquity,' the Church of Rome, whose head is the Pope. Its 'lying wonders' have truly deceived many, and out of this system have sprung the various minor systems, each claiming to be **the** church, **the** body of Christ, and each acknowledging and following others than the true Head, Christ Jesus, though all assume his name. (ZION'S WATCHTOWER, June, 1885, p. 7)

An ex-Witness has thus inherited an ingrained hatred and suspicion of everything even remotely related to the Catholic Church. From the time a person is first introduced to the teachings of the Watchtower, Catholicism has been presented as the arch-villain of Christendom; the epitome of all that is evil. It is not to be trusted, and it is to be avoided at all cost.

Is it any wonder, then, that an ex-Witness will look everywhere else **but** the Catholic Church? And, when they look at other denominations, they get the same reaction. For many of them, Catholicism is a dirty word, and scarcely rates being called, or even considered a part of the Christian Church. In fact, for more than a few denominations, it is as anti-Christian as the Witnesses themselves.

It is viewed with suspicion, fear, and distrust, and it is still believed by many to be pursuing its ultimate goal

of world domination. And yet, this is the Church that I am now asking the ex-Witness to examine.

I don't intend to launch into a full-scale defense of the Catholic Church. Nor do I intend to try and answer all the objections that Jehovah's Witnesses have raised in the 55 year span of their **PUBLICATIONS INDEX**. What I want to do is to show those Jehovah's Witnesses who have cast off their Watchtower shackles that they have nothing to fear from the Catholic Church. This is the Church in which I was born. This is the Church in which I live. And this is the Church in which I hope to die.

There is nothing in the Catholic Church that God-seeking ex-Witnesses need to be alarmed or frightened of. It is not the monstrosity painted by the Watchtower; nor is it the grasping mercenary or power-hungry institution that is so often depicted in the pages of anti-Catholic literature. I believe it is the Church founded on Christ and his apostles. Claims that I would like to examine carefully over this series of talks.

So by all means, look at the claims of other denominations; but also include in your list the claims of the Catholic Church. Don't dismiss it out of hand without even examining its credentials. Don't rely on Watchtower or Protestant sources to reach an understanding of the Church's claims, but give it the same careful and prayerful scrutiny you give to the other denominations.

Look past its buildings, its hierarchical structure,

its pomp and ceremonial splendor, and see its basic underlying foundations. The other things are all the result of its long history. They are not the Church, but accretions - the necessary trappings that have attached themselves to the Church and have become part and parcel of an organization that has lived among kings and kingdoms, emperors and empires, for nearly two thousand years. But they do not change the Church, and they are not the Church.

But, you might argue, the Church Christ founded was simple and accessible, whereas the Catholic Church is so full of ritualistic splendor and ceremony, that it is daunting to the outsider, and repels, rather than attracts the truly interested inquirer.

It is unfortunate that the attempts of earlier generations to make the liturgy more meaningful to the ordinary person, should become so foreign to a later generation. But this happens in every walk of life. Look at the ceremony which surrounds the crowning of a monarch. The basic, underlying purpose is to install the heir as king or queen, but the ceremony itself has become surrounded with pomp and splendor, that has survived centuries of turmoil and conflict.

The Catholic Church is aware that much of its ritual becomes outmoded with the passage of time, and this was one of the reasons for calling the Second Vatican Council in 1962. Every phase of its ritual was put under the microscope to see if it was meaningful to the people. And when it was found that its liturgy no longer conveyed a message, steps were taken to remedy the situation. The Conciliar Fathers also examined the Church's attitude to the Bible, to Ecumenism, to the Apostolate of the Laity, and to a whole host of other pressing subjects that needed to be seen against the backdrop of a rapidly changing

world.

Wheels were set in motion, and this self-examination has now become an on-going process, that has certainly opened the door for the ordinary person to obtain a deeper understanding of their religion.

However, apart from the pomp and ceremony which surrounds Catholic worship and practice, the question Jehovah's Witnesses and others keep asking, is how the Catholic Church, in the face of all this splendor, can continue to identify itself with the early Church?

The question is really two-fold. By "early," one assumes that they are referring to the apostolic Church of the First and Second Centuries. And here, one encounters the myth of modern times, that the expression "early Church," somehow implies that its members were some kind of "Bible-based" Christians who met regularly without the restraints of an organized hierarchical structure.

In the book, **WHAT HAS RELIGION DONE FOR MANKIND**, Jehovah's Witnesses ascribe to this view by speaking of the "virgin congregation" of the First Century, and of the simplicity of the original Christian faith.

According to the Witnesses, this early Church failed to maintain its integrity. In the August 1, 1980 **WATCHTOWER**, they listed a series of Scriptural quotes to show that a falling-away from the truth had been foretold in the Bible. And in such books as **GOD'S KINGDOM OF A THOUSAND YEARS HAS APPROACHED**, and, **LET YOUR KINGDOM COME**, they promote the falsehood of a Great Apostasy soon after the death of the last apostle.

But what of the early Church? What is the fascination with these formative years? Not only among Jehovah's Witnesses, but even among churches within the ranks of more normative

Christianity, there is this belief that the early Church of the post-apostolic period was the last and **only** time the Church truly mirrored the teachings of Jesus Christ.

And for those non-Jehovah's Witnesses who also hold this view, even if there was no great "falling away," at the very least, the Virgin Bride of Christ failed to preserve her virginity, and permitted falsities to insinuate themselves into the Christian congregation.

What we have here, is an attempt to prove that the early Church fell into error.

Now for the Watchtower, it is absolutely essential that this illusion of a great apostasy is established in the minds of its members, in order that its anti-Christian teachings can be accepted. But what can one say to professing Christians who also hold to this fallacy of a great apostasy? Even if they do not accept it to the extent of the Watchtower, to admit that Christ permitted his Church to fall into error, betrays a lamentable lack of faith and trust in Jesus and his Word.

Jesus told us that he would establish his Church, and that the "gates of hell" would not overcome it. (Mt 16:18-19) That his word was to be taught to all the nations, and that he would be with his Church always. (Mt 28:19-20) That the Holy Spirit would guide them into the whole truth. (Jn 16:13) And, that this same Spirit would remain with the Church forever. (Jn 14:16)

Anyone who subscribes to the falsehood of a great apostasy, must deny these words of Jesus. So as a little test, ask yourself these questions. Answer them with a straight "Yes" or "No."

One: Did Christ establish a Church?

- Two: Did the "gates of hell" - the powers of darkness, overcome this Church?
- Three: Is Christ with his Church always?
- Four: Has the Holy Spirit always kept the Church in the truth?
- Five: Has the Holy Spirit remained with the Church since Pentecost?

Unless one is willing to say "No" to these questions, or unless one is prepared to re-interpret them in order to avoid their implications, that person is forced to deny that any so-called "great apostasy" ever took place. For if any such apostasy did take place within the early Church, then we could never know for sure if we now have the truth.

The fact is, the story of a "great apostasy" is a myth. The Watchtower has used it as a smoke-screen to hide the heresies it has resurrected and presented as ancient and authentic Christian teachings. It is forced into this position by the need to deny the cardinal truths of Christianity: The Trinity; the Deity of Christ and the Incarnation; the Resurrection of Jesus; the doctrines of the Atonement, the Ascension, and the Second Coming; the Afterlife, and all the other great **truths** of the Christian Church that were already well past the seminal stage by the end of the First Century.

By the middle of the Second Century, the earliest Christian writers were setting forth these truths with an assurance that they were the authentic teachings of Jesus Christ. The Third and Fourth Centuries saw the formulation of these teachings into the doctrines as we have them today.

The pattern, as it emerges here, is that these teachings have the weight of apostolic authority behind them.

The Apostolic Church was acutely conscious of its birth from Christ, and those who governed it were disciples of Christ. They spoke with authority, conscious that what they taught was the authentic teaching of their risen Lord.

What I would like to do in the time remaining is to list a few of the more common objections to the Catholic Church and try and allay some of the fear and suspicion that arises whenever Catholicism is mentioned.

For many Christians, the subject of Catholicism acts as a catalyst. They regard the Catholic Church as overbearing. They object to its authoritative attitude, and totally reject its claims to apostolic succession.

I hope to develop many of these and other points more fully under their individual headings later in this series of talks, so my treatment of them here will not go into any great detail. However, I will try and show that the objections are not unanswerable. Anyone seeking further information on a particular topic or point I raise here is referred to the relevant subject matter in the later talks.

I would like to emphasize that the following objections are not new. In many cases, they have been around in one form or another for centuries, and it is only because of the likes of the Watchtower, that they still need to be answered.

For an ex-Jehovah's Witness, they still present a formidable barrier to any serious appraisal of the Catholic Church. Like objections to the Christian cross, and to blood transfusions, they are just one more lingering doubt from their Watchtower past that can never be entirely dismissed.

Indeed, for some ex-Jehovah's Witnesses, the Watchtower's indoctrination has been so thorough that their deprogramming and rehabilitation never fully overcomes the influence the Watchtower once exerted over their lives. Even years after their repudiation of the Watchtower and its errors, many ex-Witnesses still have difficulty in looking at a Christian cross or crucifix without some feeling of guilt. There is always that lingering doubt that some of the Watchtower's teachings may have had elements of truth, and for this reason there is a tendency to retain a subconscious aversion to any form of blood transfusion.

At the same time, some of the Witnesses objections to the Catholic Church are still held by certain Christian individuals and groups who are helping Jehovah's Witnesses and others out of the grip of the cults, so it is important that they are answered in as friendly a manner as possible so as they are not seen as refueling past fires.

Any Christian who feels that he or she has become the subject of a personal attack can rest assured that such is not the case. I certainly have no desire to open old wounds. Indeed, I would wish that it might not be necessary to even speak of these objections at all; but, because they exist, and, because they are still very real in the minds of so many sincere people, I feel compelled to make some attempt to correct the misconceptions they have caused, and to answer them to the best of my ability.

The formulation or defining of these teachings was not something new, but merely a declaration of what had always

been the Church's constant belief. The Church of today knows now, as it knew then, that these teachings are authentic Christian doctrine, for the unbroken tradition that links the Church of today with the Church of the First Century is all part of the self-identification that gives the Church its authority to speak in the name of Jesus.

Now, it is certain that Jehovah's Witnesses do not have this assurance; this link with the apostolic Church. This is their main reason for trying to prove that this connection is not necessary.

When one is unable to prove the unprovable, then one is forced to adopt another line: in this case, the "Great Apostasy," in an endeavor to prove that no one else has any link with the early Church.

As I mentioned a few moments ago, even some professing Christians deny that the Church maintained its integrity after the apostolic age. Any doctrines that are unpalatable are conveniently explained away as additional accretions that attached themselves to the later building, but which were never a part of the original foundation.

Lumped together in this category are the doctrines of Catholicism that the Protestant reformers of the Sixteenth Century discarded as "un-Scriptural." The doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, purgatory, the papacy, sacramental Confession or the forgiveness of sins, the intercession of the saints, devotion to Mary the Mother of God, are all part of this rejection that began over four hundred years ago, and it is still very much alive today.

For many Bible Christians, the problem is not that the Catholic Church is "un-Scriptural," but that it exists at all. The seeds that were sown at the time of the Reformation

are still bearing fruit, and Bible-based Christians, however much they may claim to be identifying themselves with the apostolic Church, still betray their Reformation heritage by denying **only** the same doctrines as the Protestant reformers, even though all come from the same source.

The denial of these doctrines can be seen to be not so much religious or theological as emotional and social. There is no attempt to even examine these doctrines from a theological or historical perspective, but simply because they are "Catholic," they are rejected out of hand.

As I said, their denial is based **solely** on the word of the reformers of the Sixteenth Century. There is no study, no dialogue, no attempt to understand the doctrines. The fact that they are "Catholic" is sufficient to condemn them. One example here should suffice.

More than twenty years ago, I read the late Walter Martin's books on the various cults. I took exception to some of the comments he made in passing on Catholicism and its doctrines, but let them pass as minor blemishes in what were otherwise well-written studies.

However, in one of his books, **THE MAZE OF MORMONISM**, Dr. Martin spoke of Mormonism's original teaching on Mary as the Mother of God. He denounced the Mormon travesty of this doctrine, but equated them with Catholics because of the supposed similarity of doctrine.

I wrote a long letter, dated August 22, 1967, to the Christian Research Institute, which Dr. Martin had founded, and I expressed my disappointment that he had thought it necessary to make such loose remarks.

I received a very courteous reply to my letter from the Institute, but not from Walter Martin personally, in which

the writer assured me that it had never been Dr. Martin's intention to make disparaging remarks against the Catholic Church. The letter then went on to answer my objections to Dr. Martin's restricted use of the pronouncements of the ancient Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon, when they could strengthen his arguments, but to ignore them when they spoke on other doctrines that are now denied by non-Catholic Christians: in this case, the teaching on Mary as the Mother of God.

The writer answered my objections by stating that the position against the "Mother of God" concept:

. . . is based primarily upon the use Catholicism has made of it. The concept enunciated by Elizabeth (cf. Luke 1:43) is quite theologically plausible when understood as referring to motherhood of the form of flesh God took when entering this world. The problem arises in the Catholic view that since 'Christ is God, and Mary is the mother of Christ - she is therefore the Mother of God.' One becomes apprehensive, in context, of the potential here for elevating Mary to the level of Deity - since, in time, the mother precedes the child.

Notice the argument used here in those closing remarks. Mary cannot be given this title for it would tend to elevate her to the level of Deity, whereas, in time, a mother precedes the child.

In his book, **JEHOVAH OF THE WATCHTOWER**, Dr. Martin had taken the Witnesses to task for using nonsensical arguments in their denial of the Trinity, such as, If Christ was God,

that is, part of the Trinity, then ". . . who ran the universe for the three days Jesus was dead and in the grave?"

What he is saying here, in answering the Witnesses, is that their reasoning is false. He wanted the Witnesses to admit that the doctrine of the Trinity does not teach that there are three Gods, but three **Persons** in **one** God. Christ the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, became man. Because of his indivisible nature, he did not cease to be God.

Yet, in the letter I received, a similar argument is used against the Mother of God doctrine. Quoting further from the same letter, we read:

The breakdown of such syllogistic reasoning is apparent, however. God exists as in indivisible **essence**. God is also a Trinity. Thus, if Mary is the mother of God, she is the mother of the Trinity.

This is precisely the type of erroneous reasoning that Dr. Martin condemns in his books on the cults. To use one's own understanding of another person's beliefs and to argue a point from a false premise is hardly the hallmark of sound scholarship.

The second point in my letter to the Christian Research Institute, was that it was wrong to quote from pronouncements of Ecumenical Councils when they agreed with your position, but to condemn them or ignore them when they did not. This is a favorite ploy of the Watchtower, only it goes much further than this by using **opposing** sources for the same purposes.

The Council of Nicaea, held in 325 A.D., is famous for a number of reasons.

It was the first Ecumenical or General Council, where

leaders of the Christian churches in all countries were invited to attend to discuss problems that demanded an official ruling; in this case, the heresy of a certain Arius, a priest of Alexandria, who was teaching that the Father alone was God, and that the Word or **Logos**, was on a slightly lower plane. In other words, that the Son was something less than God.

The outcome, of course, resulted in the condemnation of Arius, and a statement of belief that later became the Nicene Creed, and in which the truths of the Christian Church were spelled out for all time. Or were they?

Just one hundred years after the Council of Nicaea, the leaders of the Church were again called together, this time at Ephesus, to combat another heresy which had sprung from the teaching of one Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, who was teaching that the Virgin Mary should not be called "Mother of God" (**Theotokos**), for she was only the mother of the man in which the Word had become incarnate. Nestorius proposed that Mary should properly be called **Christotokos**, the "Christ-bearer," or "Mother of Christ."

The Fourth General Council convened at Ephesus on June 7, 431 A.D. But because of the late arrival of the Bishop of Antioch and his party, the first session was delayed until June 22, 431 A.D. Even then, the bishop failed to attend the opening session, and did not arrive until June 24th. The creed of the earlier council of Nicaea was read to the assembly, as were the charges against Nestorius. Each of the 125 bishops present made their profession of the Nicene faith, and, in a mass vote, they denounced Nestorius and his supporters and condemned his teachings. The Ephesian council proclaimed its accord on the great truths:

(1). That there is in Christ a union of two natures in

one Lord.

- (2) That the Blessed Virgin is properly to be called the Mother of God.

And all this took place more than fifteen and a half centuries ago.

In a round-about way, I have returned to the point I was making. I have laid the groundwork, as it were, for an understanding behind Catholicism's "Mary the Mother of God" teaching. It did not come out of a vacuum. Nor was it something that suddenly emerged in the Fifth Century.

It had been the Church's teaching since the beginning, and, like the doctrines of the Trinity, and the Incarnation, it was only when it was attacked by heretics that it became necessary to be spelled out and defined for all time.

Now what I am leading to, is that, as a "Catholic" doctrine, the teaching has been rejected. In concluding the reply to my letter to the Christian Research Institute, the writer stated quite candidly:

I am not personally aware of the intellectual intent at Ephesus; but it is against the above type of thinking that one must guard. That Mary is the greatest, most blessed woman who ever lived - I joyously affirm. That Elizabeth's declaration was ever intended to infer **more** than this, I most earnestly deny. For among other things, from this point one moves into doctrines of Mary's being sinless, etc.

The writer is admitting an ignorance of the purpose of the Ephesian Council, but is adamant that it cannot be teaching any such idea of Mary as the Mother of God - and the

reason? Because it smacks too much of Catholicism. And, to repeat again what I said at the start of this example: There is no study, no dialogue; no attempt to understand the doctrines. The fact that they are "Catholic" is sufficient to condemn them.

And this is only one doctrine. What we are talking about is a whole system of doctrines that go to make up the belief of the Catholic Church.

If this rejection of the testimony of history is the attitude of many non-Catholics, it is certainly the attitude of the Watchtower.

History, for the Watchtower Society is there to be manipulated in any way possible, so as to present Watchtower teachings as authentic Christian doctrine that links it with early Christianity.

Jehovah's Witnesses are constantly being told that in all the world, they alone come closest to the teachings of early Christianity. At the conclusion of a special issue of the **AWAKE** magazine of April 22, 1962, dealing with "Early Christianity and Modern Day Religion," the Watchtower stated:

What are the facts, then? That in regard to beliefs, conduct, manner of worship, separateness from the world, preaching message and zeal, none other than Jehovah's Witnesses measure up to the Christianity of the early Christians.

The same message is constantly being highlighted in Watchtower publications to this day. In issue after issue of the **WATCHTOWER** and **AWAKE** magazines, Witnesses are told that early Christians did not celebrate Jesus' birth; that they shunned the use of the cross in worship; that they maintained

neutrality in face of fierce opposition; that they refused to compromise; that they did not teach the doctrine of the Trinity; that they did not practice tithing; that there was no clergy/laity distinction; that they did not have temples, sacrifices, oracles, priesthood; and that these and a whole host of other early Christian practices observed by today's Jehovah's Witnesses is what distinguishes them from the false religions of so-called Christendom.

But are these the facts?

For the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses, history is a closed book. And apart from a largely stylized account, even their own century-plus history is hidden from them and remains virtually a mystery to all but a handful. As far as the Watchtower is concerned, history is there to be manipulated so as to give whatever backing is required to support its teachings.

This manipulation has been well documented, and even if it wasn't, it is a simple matter to peruse almost any Watchtower publication to see how the Witnesses quote from scholarly opinions and literature which seem to support some current facet of teaching, and then ridicule and ignore these same sources when they dare to step out of line. This picking and choosing is even more evident when they reach back to Christianity's earliest beginnings.

With absolutely nothing in common with the early Church - apart from their possible identification with the heretics of that period - the Witnesses are forced to take every comment out of context and completely ignore other statements that say the exact opposite to what they are claiming a particular passage means.

When the Jews challenged Jesus because of a cure he

performed on the Sabbath, he revealed that authority had been given to him by his Father to do such things. He pointed to their use of the Scriptures in the oft-quoted passage: "You search the Scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them, even they testify on my behalf." (Jn 5:39) And this is what the Witnesses do. They have the audacity to misquote early Church Fathers in an attempt to refute such basic Christian truths as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and his ascension into heaven, when the context **clearly** shows that ". . . even they testify on Jesus' behalf."

On page 25 of my book, **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**, I mentioned, in passing, one such misuse of patristic writing.

Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons, who lived in the latter half of the Second Century, is actually quoted by the Witnesses in support of their denial of the divinity of Christ.

In a copy of **AWAKE** magazine for April 22, 1962, page 4, the Witnesses wrote:

Despite heathen pressure to worship many gods, the early Christians stoutly refused to worship more than the one true God, Jehovah. They followed the example of Jesus, who said: 'It is Jehovah your God you must worship, and it is to him alone you must render sacred service.' (Mt. 4:10) Irenaeus argued in support of their view when he said: 'It is proper, then, that I should begin with the first and most important head, that is, God the Creator, who made the heaven and the earth, and all things that are therein . . . and to demonstrate that there is nothing

either above him or after him; nor that, influenced by anyone, but by his own free will, he created all things, since he is the only God, the only Lord, the only Creator, and the only Father, alone containing all things.

The same article then continues a little further on:

Although the corrupting of the early Christian organization eventually caused to be adopted the erroneous belief that Christ is actually God and part of a triune Godhead, early Christians clung to the Scriptural fact that Christ is not equal with the Father and co-eternal with him.

Now, having seen fit to quote from Irenaeus to defend their denial of the divinity of Christ, the Witnesses must be prepared to let him speak for himself on this all-important Christian teaching. From his most famous work, **AGAINST HERESIES** - and the Watchtower's teachings are certainly the embodiment of all those ancient heresies - Irenaeus has more than a little to say on the divinity of Jesus.

From Henry Bettenson's translation of **THE EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS**, come the following selection of statements from Irenaeus. These should certainly show the true beliefs of this early Christian writer:

The Son always co-exists with the Father, and has revealed the Father from of old, from the beginning. (Book 2: 30, 9)

The name of God or Lord is given only to him who is God and Lord of all; who said to Moses, 'My name is I AM. And you shall say to the Israelites, HE WHO IS has sent me to you.' The name of God and Lord is given also to his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who makes men the sons of God if they believe in his name. And the Son says to Moses, 'I have come down to remove this people.' For it is the Son who descended and ascended for the salvation of men. Thus through the Son who is in the Father, and has the Father in himself, HE WHO IS has been revealed. (Book 4: 6, 2)

God makes all things in measure and order, and with him nothing is without proportion. He was right who said that the immeasurable Father is measured in the Son; for the Son is the measure of the Father, since he **contains** the Father. (Book 4: 4, 2)

God became man, and it is the Lord himself who saved us. (Book 3: 21, 1)

There are many more statements by Irenaeus on Christ and his relationship with the Father, but enough has been said to satisfy anyone on the orthodoxy of his position. There is simply no room in the examples I have quoted to leave any doubt in any honest person's mind that any attempt to use Irenaeus to defend the Watchtower's anti-Christian views, is doomed to failure.

History is important. It is our link with the past. If it is so important in regard to one's country, how much more

so in regard to one's links with Jesus and his apostles. But when it is so clearly evident that Jehovah's Witnesses distort history to suit their own purposes, then one is justified in examining their other credentials.

Now the Catholic Church has the Scriptures, and it has the testimony of history to support its teachings. And this is not just a history of a hundred years ago. This is a history that had its beginnings with Christ and his apostles. Try as they might, the Witnesses are unable to counter this claim.

In such publications as the 1959 book, **JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES IN THE DIVINE PURPOSE**, and in the 1981 book, **LET YOUR KINGDOM COME**, the Witnesses encourage their view that Catholicism had its beginnings with the Roman Emperor, Constantine, in the Fourth Century. This absurd claim, which I will discuss in detail in a later talk, is put forward again and again in the pages of Watchtower literature. And the sad thing is, Witnesses will accept it on the word of the Watchtower without ever attempting to find out if it is true.

It is enough that the Watchtower has said it, so there is nothing more to say.

So an ex-Witness already has an inbuilt prejudice against the Catholic Church through his or her association with the Watchtower. Is it any wonder, then, that having struggled clear of the Watchtower organization, that they would even bother looking at the claims of Catholicism?

As I said at the start of this talk, there is opposition to Catholicism on a double front. And the ex-Witness

will have little hesitation in looking elsewhere when seeking answers to the question: **WHICH CHURCH?**

But again, I say to this person, don't dismiss it without a hearing. If you have shown the courage to shake off the Watchtower's shackles, and if you are genuinely seeking the truth, then you owe it to yourself to examine **all** the claimants to the "truth that leads to eternal life."

Now you may have difficulty in reconciling Catholic doctrines with the Scriptures. You may have a thousand doubts and objections to the Catholic Church - perhaps even more if you have spent any length of time in the Watchtower organization; and I certainly cannot hope to answer all these doubts here. But I can tell you that there **are** answers to your questions - if you really want them.

Some of the more common objections will be answered in this series of talks on the Witnesses and the Catholic Church. In the companion tapes I will be speaking on the Apostolic Church; Peter the Rock, and the Papacy; The Catholic Church and the Bible; the Eucharist; Purgatory; Mary the Mother of God; and, if I get enough feedback from those who hear these tapes, I hope also to include a questions and answers tape on various problems that non-Catholic Christians encounter when they set out to examine the claims of the Catholic Church.

If I do not examine your specific questions in these talks, and if you are unable to find satisfactory answers elsewhere, then I am available to answer it personally. I give my address at the end of each talk for that purpose. And, if your particular question is so urgent or important to you that you require an immediate answer, then I also include my telephone number.

The Catholic Church is there. Despite the prophecies of doom, which the Watchtower has been issuing for more than one hundred years, it won't go away. It is a fact of life; a reality. Many regard it as an anachronism - as having outlived its usefulness. They want it to go away, but it won't. It can't. It was given a mission by Christ to "make disciples of all nations," and to "teach them everything" as he has commanded. It cannot do otherwise.

I believe the Catholic Church was founded by Jesus Christ, and I have developed this series of talks on this belief. It may be a claim that many people will find offensive and presumptuous, but it is my sincere conviction, based on overwhelming evidence from all available sources that the Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ in the world today.

I could certainly water down my remarks and weaken my statements so as to "win friends and influence people," but that would be less than honest. And, to use the words of the apostle Paul: "Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Gal 4:16)

Catholic teachings, whether "convenient or inconvenient," may not always be palatable, but they are consistent and unchanging - much more than can be said for the chameleon-like teachings of the Watchtower. It certainly deserves to be taken seriously, and any ex-Witness, any Christian or non-Christian, is urged to examine carefully, the claims of the Catholic Church, which Paul, in his First Letter to Timothy, called, "the pillar and foundation of truth." (1 Tim 3:15)

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

BY

JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

Greetings!

This series of talks on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Catholic Church deals with issues that cause tremendous problems for those people who are thinking of leaving, or, have already left,

the Watchtower organization.

At the same time, these issues contain some of the most controversial questions that still present formidable barriers to Christian unity.

I make no attempt to sidestep any of the issues involved, for they are too important to be glossed over, and anything less than an honest approach is a denial of the truths of Christianity. So much of what I have to say is also relevant to the current Catholic/Protestant dialogue, and many of the issues will bring feelings of resentment and open hostility from some of the less ecumenically-minded Christian churches of today.

This is to be regretted, but it is unavoidable if I am to fully examine the issues that have torn Christianity apart for more than 400 years.

This particular talk is centered on Christ and his Church, and we at once enter into one of the most hotly debated areas of discussion in Christianity today.

Did Christ found a Church? And, is it still in the world today?

There are so many conflicting answers to these two questions that a person could be forgiven for being more than a little confused and bewildered by them all.

Jehovah's Witnesses, of course, never cease to highlight these divisions of Christianity, and they belittle all attempts towards responsible ecumenical discussions. Their reasoning runs something like this: "Why pray for the success of these discussions when God himself has turned away from the churches, and is even now planning to wipe them off the face of the earth?"

The Witnesses disassociate themselves from the Christian churches and refuse to admit that they themselves are just one more clanging gong among the many conflicting claimants of so-called Christendom - a term, which, by the way, they themselves have coined, and given a meaning that is meant to derogate it in the minds of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In Watchtower publications, the Church has emerged as a whipping-boy. Anything that is wrong in the world of religion is presented as a fault of the Church. But this is to be expected. Nothing positive can ever be said, or Witnesses might find that there ~~is~~ an alternative to the Watchtower.

Like newspapers, or other media coverage, the Watchtower relies on division to highlight its message, for after all, its wars that make news, not peace; plagues make news, not good health; broken homes make news, not happy families. Gloom and despair are the order of the day, and a Church that can be shown to be full of corruption and deceit is needed to prove to its followers that there is nothing that is good outside of the organization.

But to examine, for a moment, the question of the Church, it is necessary to point out a few of the problem areas it embraces.

There are many Christian groups who deny that Christ ever founded a Church, in the sense of a visible organization presided over by a hierarchy of bishops and priests. They see themselves as having arrived back at the basics - or rather - what **they** conceive of as early Christianity.

They form little Christian congregations, with every

separate group being a law unto itself, admitting of no outside interference.

They are totally self-contained. The Bible is their sole source of revelation; it is their supreme authority. There is no one, no thing higher to appeal to - except God, and he is spoken of and spoken to as though he was actually an **exclusive** part of each particular group.

What I am describing here in this first instance is Christian Fundamentalism. It is a process that has evolved from the early years of this present century. Actually, Fundamentalism is much older than that, and it is not so much a process as an attitude problem, that stems from a rejection of legitimate and reasonable authority in religion.

There are, of course, varying types or degrees of Fundamentalism. Just as there are "doctors and there are doctors; and there are lawyers and there are lawyers," so too, there are Fundamentalists who are part of the mainstream of Christianity, and there are others who are "over the edge."

Now I am **not** attacking Fundamentalists, or any other Christian group, in this talk. That is not planned or intended. What I am trying to do is to highlight just a **few** of the areas which a talk of this nature has to cover. Fundamentalism is just one of those areas, and it represents a particular group, which, because of its widespread use of television, radio and newsprint, has an important influence on those people coming out of the Watchtower.

If the Fundamentalists are the only Christians that ex-Jehovah's Witnesses come into contact with, then their grasp of Christianity is going to be distorted.

Thankfully, many ex-Witnesses, having been "once bitten" are careful to look more closely the second time around, and are less likely to be taken in by a caricature of Christianity.

Fundamentalism, as I said, is also found in mainstream Christianity. But this is fundamentalism without the bigotry and prejudice that marks the more fanatical extremism of the former. This second group is the one that most of us are more familiar with. It is their use of the media that has made them so well known.

They are the "Born Agains," or, as they prefer to call themselves, Evangelicals. Billy Graham, being perhaps, one of the best known personalities in this group. In recent years, however, other, more colorful names, have hit the headlines around the world, but for different reasons.

I will return to these groups again and again in these talks for they are emerging, at least in the western world, as influential exponents of a "new" Christianity.

But getting away from "new" Christianity for a while, let's look at a somewhat older form. Actually, I should be speaking in the plural, for I am referring to the more established churches that have emerged in the past four centuries. These are the mainstream churches, such as the Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, and other denominational churches that are now found throughout the world.

They are called "mainstream" because of their acceptance of the cardinal truths of Christianity. Their influence varies from country to country, and it was from one or another of these denominations that most of the earlier "evangelicals" emerged.

At the present time, there is on-going dialogue between

many of the churches, which has already resulted in a number of "official" mergers, that are meant to strengthen their voice, and bear a more united witness to Christ.

And finally, to Catholicism; in many ways as strange and mysterious to Protestants as it is to Jehovah's Witnesses. Hopefully, in this series of talks, the veil may be lifted just that much higher so as to dispel the mystery and reveal something of the glory of Catholicism.

The theme of all these talks is centered on the Catholic Church, and this particular talk deals with Christ and the Church he founded. The inference is there - but are they one and the same?

Jehovah's Witnesses, in their 1981 book, **LET YOUR KINGDOM COME**, put Catholic beginnings early in the 4th century. The March 1, 1968, copy of **THE WATCHTOWER**, page 143, gave the actual date for the establishment of the Catholic Church as 325 A.D. According to Jehovah's Witnesses, this date is the year in which the Emperor Constantine set up the Catholic Church as the official religion of the Roman Empire.

And I quote:

"True to warning, the apostasy appeared in the next century, when professed Christian leaders started to fall away from true doctrine and worship, and it became complete in 325 C.E., with Constantine's establishing Catholicism as the state religion of the Roman Empire, and adopting the pagan 'trinity' as the central doctrine of the Christian religion."

Actually, the Witnesses are twelve years out in their dating, for acceptance and Imperial favor towards Christianity were granted in the year 313 A.D., when the emperors Constantine and Licinius met at Milan and agreed to acknowledge Christianity as a lawfully recognized religion, thereby ending nearly 250 years of persecution and suppression, which had its beginnings with the burning of Rome in 64 A.D.

The year 325 A.D., which the Watchtower refers to, was the date the Council of Nicaea was convened. The same council, which, by the way, defined the teaching of the divinity of Christ.

The 4th century date for Catholic beginnings is by no means unanimous. Depending on one's particular religious or political persuasion, the dates can be changed to suit one's own beliefs.

The late Dr. Walter Martin, for example, who was well-known to Jehovah's Witnesses and other cultic followers for his scholarly works on Christian sects, wrote a book on Catholicism back in 1958, called **THE ERRORS OF ROMANISM**. In preparation for a later re-printing of this book, he put out a three-volume set of audio cassettes which were recorded at a series of lectures he gave on the same subject.

Dr. Martin's first tape, dealing with the question of Peter the Rock (a subject that is also treated in this series of talks on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Catholic Church), puts the date in the 10th century. But notice what is being said here.

This 10th century date marks the split between the East and the West. In actual fact, the schism was a gradual and complicated process that was spread over some two hundred years.

It began with the dispute between Ignatius, the deposed patriarch of Constantinople, and his emperor-appointed successor, Photius, in 858 A.D., and it became absolute in the year 1054.

Dr. Martin stated that it was in this period that the word "Roman" first came into general use to designate the Western side of Christianity. Presumably, prior to the 10th century, or rather, the 9th century, Christianity was **ONE!**

Now, if, prior to this period, the Church was **one**; and if, from the time of the schism, the Catholic Church has become the "Roman" Church and has fallen into error, then the Church Christ founded must have continued on in the Eastern, or Orthodox Church.

But such is not the case, for the Eastern churches are also presumed to be in error on more than just a few issues.

So what we are faced with is a Church founded by Christ, struggling to maintain its integrity over the centuries, and failing dismally!

Many Christians, today, believe that Protestantism helped to tip the balance in our favor by casting aside all the errors that had been permitted to creep in over the years. Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand, believe that Protestantism was too tainted by Romanism to be effective in dispelling all error, and that today, it too, is just as much under the condemnation of God as Romanism.

What I want to do now is go back to the beginning. I want to present the case, firstly, for the Church, and ultimately, for Catholicism. For many people, this may well be the first time they have ever heard a case presented for Catholicism.

For others, who may have read anti-Catholic tracts or books that seem to proliferate in certain areas, the evidence I use may have been previously distorted in this sort of literature, and it will be necessary to look at it anew.

I am not asking or expecting that this single talk, or even this series of talks, will sway any person towards accepting Catholicism. But, what I do ask, is that there might be at least an honest attempt to put aside pre-conceived ideas, and listen to a presentation of the evidence for the case for the Catholic Church.

If, at the end of the talk, a listener feels just as strongly against Catholicism, I hope that they might be able to see that it is not as entirely unreasonable as some of its critics suggest.

The first point to be established is that Christ actually founded a Church, and the primary evidence for this is to be found in the Scriptures.

To avoid become tiresome, and overlaying my presentation with text on text, I will limit myself to only one or two of the more pertinent Scriptures to establish each point.

The word "Church" refers to an assembly or community. Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to speak of it as a "congregation," a word which is quite acceptable, and is used by translations other than the Witnesses' own New World Translation.

The idea of a community or congregation of God is seen quite clearly in passages such as Romans 16:5, where Paul speaks of the community or congregation that meets at "the house of Prisca and Aquila"; and in Colossians 4:15, he speaks of the

community that meets at the "house of Nymphas."

The concept also enlarges to take in a city, as in Acts 8:1, and 11:2, where we hear of the church or community "in Jerusalem." Then we hear of the same church as existing in Antioch; (Acts 14:26) in Corinth; (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1) and in Philippi. (Phil 4:21)

These churches did not exist in a vacuum. They were united in a common bond of faith in Jesus Christ and the teaching of the apostles. In Acts 2:43 we are told that they "devoted themselves to the apostles' instructions and the communal life; to the breaking of bread, and the prayers."

The story of the conversion of Saul (as told in Acts, Chapter 9) came about as a result of a concerted effort on his part to wipe out the Christian Church; but, when the fury of the persecution had abated, we are told that the "church" (in the singular) was at peace "throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria." (Acts 9:31)

Then the concept of the church is further enlarged so as to give it a world-wide or universal dimension, as in Ephesians 1:22-23, where it is described as the "body" of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills the universe in all its parts"; and in 1 Timothy 3:15, as the "church of the living God."

We need to keep in mind that all these scattered churches are autonomous only because of geographical conditions. They are **part** of the "body of Christ" **insofar** as they accept the teachings of the apostles. Peter, for example, preached to the Jews after Pentecost and "those who **accepted his message** were baptized." (Acts 2:41) And again, Paul praised the Thessalonians for accepting the message . . . "not as the word

of man, but as it truly is, the word of God." (1 Thess 2:13)

The new converts were not free to believe what they wanted. The teachings of the apostles, which the apostles themselves had received from Christ, (1 Cor 11:23) were fixed for all time. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, speaks of some who have gone after "another gospel", (Gal 1:6) and he warns the Galatians that not even he can alter or add to the word of God. This point is so important, that he repeats it a second time: "If anyone preaches a Gospel to you other than the one you received, let a curse be upon him." (Gal 1:8-9)

Now there are those today who condemn any form of organizational structure in the Christian Church. It is spoken of disparagingly, and even ridiculed. The **early** Church is held up as model of independence: self-determining, self-governing, self-ruling - free in Christ. But such an organization is a figment of their imagination. It has never existed - then, or now.

I have spoken to, and listened to, people who have come out of the Watchtower. They have recounted how they were very careful to choose wisely, the second time around. They did not act hastily, but tried numerous churches, before settling on the right one - for them!

And how did they choose? They listened to the message that was preached. They looked at how the congregation behaved towards one another. One person (not a Jehovah's Witness), even chose her church on the basis of the building material used in the construction of the building itself. It was old; it was bluestone; so it was right.

But to be realistic; to be sincere, and to be a true seeker after what is right, one has to have a little more depth than accepting the truth because it is taught in a bluestone building.

We have to ask ourselves the question: "Are we receiving the Gospel message that was taught by Christ and his apostles?"

Everyone will immediately answer "Yes. Yes, we do have the same Gospel message today, that those early Christians had 2,000 years ago. Everything is still the same."

But is it?

From the earliest times; from the times of the apostles themselves, the means of determining a person's orthodoxy was by means of creedal formulas. The most basic of creeds could also be the earliest. It is the simple affirmation, "Jesus is Lord," (as found in Romans 10:9 and Philippians 2:11.) In varying forms it is used again and again throughout the New Testament writings.

From this simple statement of faith, other creedal declarations followed. They were used in instruction in the basic Christian truths. Anyone who takes the time to study the New Testament writings will soon notice other creed-like expressions which betray their popular usage.

These formula statements appear to have had wide-spread use in the liturgy of the early Church, and one of the most-common areas was in the preparation for baptism, where the "catechumens," the term which was used to describe the persons undergoing instruction for baptism, were called upon to renounce their former pagan beliefs and practices, and give their assent to the truths of Christianity.

Other simple formulas include the expression of faith in

Jesus as the Messiah. For example, First John 2:22, identifies the liar as whoever "denies that Jesus is the Christ"; and in First John 4:15, the confession of faith in Jesus as "the Son of God," singles one out as abiding in God and with God abiding in him.

As well as these simple declarations of faith in the person of Jesus Christ, the catechumens were called upon to give their assent to other areas of Christian belief, such as the atonement, the resurrection, and Christ's ascension into glory.

From the numerous examples of these fragmentary creeds in the New Testament, I have chosen one from Paul's First letter to the Corinthians, which he describes as of "first importance," and in which he sets out the pattern of the Christian message. Stated briefly, it runs: "That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures; that he appeared to Kephas, then to the twelve . . . after which he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." (1 Cor 15:3)

The kernel of the Christian message can be seen in this short statement of faith; and this was typical of the way in which the Gospel was first proclaimed.

Creedal statements can also be seen in the famous passage from Philippians 2:6-11, which, because of its rhythmic setting, is generally regarded as part of an early Christian hymn. First Timothy 3:16 is another example of early liturgical expression.

So even in its earliest infancy, the Christian Church had already laid down basic requirements for condition of entry into the community.

If we go back to First Corinthians again, to what Paul

spoke of as of "first importance," we see that this passage contains these essential truths that the Christian converts were required to accept.

Now it is from these essentials that the Christian faith began to grow. Paul spoke of Christ as having "died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures," so it would have been natural to ask: "Who is Christ?" And, as Philip did with the eunuch in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8, using a similar question as a starting point, the apostles were able to explain the Christian message in greater detail.

And again, when Paul visited Athens, he saw a city full of idols. The Athenians even had an altar erected to an "unknown god" to appease any deity they may have inadvertently forgotten. Paul used this altar as a starting point to bring the Christian message to the people of Athens. (Acts 17)

So the expressions of faith formed the basis for the later creeds. But the creeds themselves were only formulas containing the barest essentials, whereas the Christian communities, presided over by the apostles or their representatives, were **living** communities. That is, their faith was growing. It was alive and active, and as they grew to maturity, they needed something more substantial - the "solid food" mentioned in First Corinthians 3:2. Catch phrases, such as "Jesus is Lord" needed to be expanded and explained.

A creed encapsulates a person's belief, but it does not flesh it out. One needs to go into more detail to give, what Peter spoke of, as "an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope." (1 Pet 3:15)

This fleshing out, or explaining the phrase "Jesus is Lord"

ran into many centuries. The greatest minds of the early Church wrestled with the intricacies of the doctrine, and the fierce controversies that followed are a testimony to the complexities of this most-important of Christian truths.

When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, and the earthquake freed them from their chains, the terrified jailer asked what he had to do to be saved. Paul's answer was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved." (Acts 16:30) Then and there, we are told, they "spoke the word of the Lord to him and to everyone in his house," and, after **hearing** the word, they **believed** and were **baptized**.

This sequence of faith-steps is repeated again and again throughout the life of the early Church.

First comes the **hearing**, then the person is moved by the Spirit to accept the message and **believe**, and then comes the **baptism** into Christ and entry into the Christian community.

Justin Martyr, an early Christian apologist wrote three major works that are an important witness to post-apostolic Christianity. In his First Apology, written around 155 A.D., he speaks of the Christian's conversion to new life in Christ, and the importance of baptism. He writes:

I will explain how we also dedicated ourselves to God when we were made new through Christ; lest, if we omit this, we seem to be in anyway unfair in our explanation. As many as are persuaded and believe that the things are true which they are taught by us and said to be true, and undertake to be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission

of their past sins, and we pray and fast with them. Then they are brought by us to where there is water and are born again in the same manner in which we were ourselves born again. For in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water." (Justin, Apology I, 61)

Baptism was seen as the initiation into the Christian community, and those, who today, tend to dismiss baptism as of no account, or of little importance, would do well to ponder the words of Justin Martyr, and other early Christian writers and ask themselves if they really have the "faith that was once for all handed down to the holy ones." (Jude 3)

To answer this question truthfully, it is also necessary to examine one's position on other controversial issues. Keeping in mind, that these other issues were also accepted as the faith of the early Church, and that they **only** became controversial when they were cast aside by those who refused to accept or submit to the teaching authority of the Church.

Paul urged the Corinthians to "examine themselves," to see whether they were "living in faith." (2 Cor 13:5) He asked them if they realized that Jesus Christ was living in them, and then told them that if they did not believe he was, then they had failed the test.

Using this same approach, I have listed a number of questions that I now ask you to answer to test your own faith. Answer them with a straight "yes" or "no," and see how you fare.

## QUESTION

1. Do you accept a visible Church? (Eph 2:19-22; Mt 5:14)
2. Do you accept the continued primacy of Peter's office in the Church - i.e., the Papacy? (Mt 16:18; Jn 21:15-17)
3. Do you believe baptism is necessary for salvation? (Jn 3:5 Mt 28:19)
4. Do you believe that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharistic bread? (1 Cor 11:23-30)
5. Do you believe that regular reception of the Eucharist is necessary to gain eternal life? (Jn 6:52-56).
6. Do you accept the power of the Church to forgive sin in the name of Christ? (Jn 20:23)
7. Do you accept the authority of the Church to govern in Christ's name? (Mt 18:18; Lk 10:16).
8. Do you believe in the Virgin Birth of Christ? (Lk 1:34)
9. Do you believe in the immortality of the soul? (Mt

10:28; Rev 6:9)

10. Do you pray for the dead? (2 Macc 12:45)

Now, as I said, these are all questions that were raised in the infant Church. They received satisfactory answers from early Christian writers, and these answers are still satisfactory today. But if a person's religious background is such that some of these questions receive a negative answer, then other questions need to be asked as to why there is no longer any acceptance of these important truths.

Jehovah's Witnesses are well-known for making use of early Christian sources when it is a question of supporting their teachings, and to reject or ridicule these same writers when there is any hint of disagreement.

Unfortunately, in the Christian Church today, we have the same situation. The Bible is held up as the supreme authority. Early Christian writers are freely quoted to add support to a particular view, but let there be the slightest deviation, and these same sources are condemned as of no account.

One particular conversation I had with a Protestant Minister and scholar on this very point, brought the remark that the early writers wrote for **their day only**, and that they are no longer relevant for today. I was informed that circumstances have changed so much that the Bible has to be reinterpreted to suit today's conditions.

But despite what the critics may say, or how they shift the emphasis or interpret the disparity, it is not a question

as to whether the writer is inspired or speaking infallibly; or if what he is saying is to have the same authority as the Bible. It comes down to a person's own interpretation of the Scriptures - what he believes a particular passage is saying; and if he has already made up his own mind as to what a text is saying, then every contrary source or statement must be mistaken.

We have precious little information from the Church's earliest years, but what we do have is treasured like a family history or record. If we want to understand how the early Christians lived, how they worshipped, how they understood certain Scriptures, how they settled controversies or disputes, then we have to go back to contemporary sources and examine the evidence.

Now there are those who would reject all such evidence; they would cast aside all such extra-biblical sources as of no account. But in so doing, they are also rejecting the only witness that can corroborate the Scriptures they hold so dearly.

It is the Church and her children, who gathered the sacred writings together, and who today still bear witness to what is, and what is not to be accepted as authentic. Now this can lead us into a whole new area of discussion which I would prefer to leave to a later talk; so I am not side-stepping any issue or controversy here, I am merely leaving at aside at this particular time in order to give it a fuller treatment in a later discussion.

But to get back to the early Church, what we need to do is to clarify some of the terminology we use. When we speak of the "early Church" or the "infant Church" we are not referring

to a Church that is still being fed or living on the "milk food" spoken of in First Corinthians (1 Cor 3:1ff). The Church had already received the Holy Spirit (Jn 20:22; Acts 2), and was being guided by the Spirit (Jn 16:13). It was alive and active; it had reached maturity.

But in terms of **age** it was young - very young. Those who had received the Christian message from Jesus himself - the apostles and the immediate disciples, such as Barnabas, Silas, Mark, Timothy, Titus, and many others whose names appear as companions and friends of the first apostles, were still alive, "though some had fallen asleep." (1 Cor 15:6)

The Christians of these formative years knew them personally, or knew of them.

It is the same today. World leaders, or famous men of our time who have died, are still very much a part of our time. Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and numerous others are still household names, and their achievements and the words they spoke are still remembered by us.

By the end of the First Century A.D., the final New Testament writings were still being gathered together. Even at this stage, there was still no consensus as to what writings were or were not to be accepted as inspired. Liturgical forms were very fluid, and matters of doctrine were not the issue they were to become in later years.

But for all this, the Church was growing and expanding throughout the then-known world, and the disciples of those second generation Christians were beginning to put pen to paper to record their memories of the apostles and their followers; to record the problems the Church had to overcome in their part

of the world, and to list the achievements of some of the people who had already given their lives for Christ. Others wrote of the every-day activities of the Church.

Justin Martyr, for example, who was born towards the end of the First Century A.D., and who suffered death around the year 165 A.D., recorded one of the most important eye-witness descriptions of the Christian liturgy:

"On the day which is called the sun's day, there is an assembly of all who live in the towns or the country; and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as much as time permits. When the reader is finished, the president gives a discourse, admonishing us and exhorting us to imitate these excellent examples. Then we all rise together and offer prayers; and, as I said before, on the conclusion of our prayer, bread is brought, and wine and water: and the president similarly offers up prayers and thanksgiving to the best of his power, and the people assent with '**Amen!**' Then follows the distribution of the Eucharistic gifts [i.e. "eucharisted things" - things over which thanks have been offered] and the partaking of them all: and they are sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons." (Justin, **First Apology**, 65)

If attention has been paid to the wording of this account, it can be seen that all the essentials of the Catholic Mass are there. And this is but one of a number of early eye-witness accounts that describe the Eucharistic celebration.

The Eucharistic celebration, which Catholics generally refer to as "the Mass," is perhaps **the** major point of departure between Catholic and non-Catholic forms of worship. Protestant groups do not accept a sacrificial element in the Eucharistic celebration, whereas, Catholics do. And it has been this way for more than 400 years.

It becomes necessary at this point to compare our forms of worship today with that of the early Church, and see if it is possible to identify them with the worship of apostolic times.

The sacrificial element I spoke of a moment ago, highlights the major difference between the forms of worship today. Protestant churches emphasize the **Word** of God, and build the whole service around the pulpit or stand from which the Word is proclaimed. Catholics, on the other hand, see the liturgy of the Word as one **part** of the dual act of instruction and worship, which prepares the people for the central act of worship which follows.

Now for Jehovah's Witnesses, who have no real Eucharistic background, this subject matter may have little importance. After all, the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses have never partaken of the bread and wine at their **annual** Memorial. Only those select few of the 8,734 remaining members of the "Anointed Class" (1990 **YEARBOOK** figures - which number is up 49 on the previous year) are permitted to partake of the bread and wine. The other nine and a half million who attended the Memorial around the world, sat silently and "observed" the passing of the bread and wine among them.

But even in certain Protestant churches, the situation is not all that different. The Eucharistic emphasis is so toned down as to be almost non-existent. Certainly, in many churches, the Eucharistic element is of secondary importance to the preaching side of the service.

There is a need to go back to the Reformation period to see how this disparity came about.

Prior to the Reformation in the 16th century, there had been individuals who had denied that there was any **real presence** of Christ in the Eucharist. But their voices had been comparatively small, and for the most part, their objections had died with them.

The first real objection to the historical understanding of Christ's presence in the Eucharist, came in the persons of the Englishman, John Wycliffe, and the Bohemian, John Huss. Although their objections virtually died with them also, they were revived two centuries later by the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century; and they have been with us ever since.

With the rejection of the Mass and the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the Reformers went about a systematic substitution of a new form of worship.

In place of the **altar** with its connotations of sacrifice, they substituted a **table**, as for a meal. As there was no sacrifice, a **priest** was not required, and he became a minister, or preacher of the Word. The **pulpit** became more important than the altar, and the **Bible** assumed the prominence that had been

previously reserved for Christ in the Eucharist.

In this way, fifteen centuries of Christian history was cast aside, and in place of the Mass, the people were given a **service of the Word**.

But there was still the history. There was still the family record to witness as to how it **had** been. As it was impossible to expunge the record completely, theologians and historians have attempted to weaken its force by reinterpreting the evidence.

Protestant theologians will argue that the Church of the first two centuries knew only of a subjective sacrifice of praise, of thanksgiving, and of adoration, and that it was not until the later Fathers came on the scene that this act of worship came to be regarded as an objective, tangible sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ on the altar.

But such is not the case. Clement of Rome, who died before the end of the First Century A.D., has certain rather obscure references to the sacrificial element of the Eucharist. In his letter to the Christians at Corinth, he urged them to be united. Just as Jerusalem was the only place where lawful sacrifices of the Old Covenant could be offered, so too, in Corinth, there must be only one assembly, and one place of worship. He writes:

Let each of you, my brothers, give thanks to God in his own order, with a good conscience, not transgressing the fixed rule of his service, and with solemn reverence

. . . it is not in every place that the various sacrifices . . . are offered, but in Jerusalem only; and even there, not in every place, but before the shrine at the altar." (Clement's **Letter to the Corinthians** 41:1)

And further on, Clement continued:

"It will be no small sin for us if we crush out from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered the gifts." (ibid. 44:4)

The expression "offered the gifts" suggests a tangible sacrificial gift.

Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred around the year 107 A.D., indicated the sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic celebration when he spoke of the "altar" which was **the** place of sacrifice:

"Be careful, therefore, to celebrate only one Eucharist; for there is only one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and only one chalice of unification with his blood; only one altar, as there is only one bishop with the presbyters and the deacons." (Ignatius, **Letter to the Ephesians** 5:2)

The **Didache**, or Teaching of the Apostles, is dated somewhere around the end of the First Century A.D., and is therefore an important witness to the sacrificial aspect of the Eucharistic

celebration:

"On the Lord's day, assemble together and break bread and give thanks, first making public confession of your faults, that your **sacrifice** may be pure. If any man has a quarrel with his friend, let him not join your assembly until they are reconciled, so that your **sacrifice** may not be defiled. For this is the sacrifice spoken of by the Lord: 'In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice.'" (DIDACHE 14:1ff)

The Scripture text quoted in this passage from the Didache is from the prophet Malachi 1:10. This text has now joined the rather unique group of Scriptures that have had their meaning expounded by the General Council of the Catholic Church. At the 22nd Session of the Council of Trent in 1562, the bishops declared that the prophecy of Malachi referred primarily to the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

The prophet, speaking in the name of God, tells the people that the insincerity behind the sacrificial offerings is displeasing to him:

"Oh, that one among you would shut the Temple gates; to keep you from kindling fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you says the Lord of Hosts, neither will I accept any sacrifice from your hands. For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among

the nations; and everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name and a pure offering." (Mal 1:10-11)

Malachi is telling the people that God is going to abolish their temple sacrifices, and replace them with a **pleasing** sacrifice that will be offered to his name. It is going to be a "pure offering" - that is, a "clean sacrifice." It will be offered "everywhere"; from morning to night. The universal nature of this sacrificial offering from the Gentile nations points to the Messianic era. The temple sacrifices are no more, and the sacrifice of the cross was offered in one place only.

But Christ's sacrifice, which was offered "once for all," (Heb 7:27) is the be-all and end-all of sacrificial offering; and Catholic Christians have always believed that the Mass is the **self-same** sacrifice of Calvary **renewed** on the altar when the priest, in obedience to the command of Jesus at the Last Supper, says the words of consecration (Lk 22:14-20), and makes Christ present sacramentally under the form of bread and wine.

This is not a mere "idealist" reminiscence on our part; nor is it an endless repetition of Christ's death. As the Scriptures say, "he died to sin once for all," and that he "dies no more" for "death no longer has power over him." (Rom 6:9-10)

This renewal of the atoning sacrifice of Christ and its application to our time, takes place each time the Church fulfills in cultic gesture, what Jesus himself did when celebrating the Last Supper. And as often as the Church performs

this commemoration, it is proclaiming "the death of the Lord until he comes." (1 Cor 11:26)

That this has always been the teaching and understanding of the Christian Church from the beginning, can be seen from the writings of the early Fathers. I have mentioned the passage from the **Didache**, where the Eucharistic celebration is referred to as a sacrifice.

Ignatius of Antioch, to whom we owe the first use of the "Eucharist" as a name for the sacrament and the celebration, wrote a number of letters to the churches on his way to be martyred at Rome in 107 A.D. In his **Letter to the Philadelphians**, he wrote:

"Take great care to keep one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup to unite us by his blood."

Justin Martyr, who was beheaded at Rome during the reign of the emperor, Marcus Aurelius, in the year 165 A.D., also has much to say on the Eucharistic celebration. In his **FIRST APOLOGY**, he refers to the food which is "called Eucharist with us." He writes on the restriction of the Eucharist to those who believe, and he continues:

"We do not receive these gifts as ordinary food or

ordinary drink. But as Jesus Christ our Savior was made flesh through the Word of God, he took flesh and blood for our salvation; in the same way the food over which thanksgiving has been offered through the word of prayer which we have from him - the food by which our blood and flesh are nourished through its transformation - is, we are taught, the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh." (**FIRST APOLOGY, 66**)

And in his **DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO**, he writes: "Christ instituted a sacrifice of bread and wine which Christians offer in every place."

Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, who died around 200 A.D., wrote a detailed attack on Gnosticism, an early Christian heresy, in his most famous work, **AGAINST ALL HERESIES**. He also refers to the prophecy of Malachi, which I quoted earlier, and compares the Jewish and Christian modes of worship. Speaking of the former, he writes:

"Concerning this, Malachi thus prophesied: 'I will not receive sacrifice at your hands . . . In every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure sacrifice, for my name is great among the Gentiles. ' By this he quite clearly means that the former people will **cease** to offer

to God, but in every place a "**sacrifice**" will be offered, and that, a "**pure**" sacrifice; while his name is glorified among the Gentiles." (AGAINST HERESIES, Book 4, 17:4)

This application of the prophecy of Malachi, which I quoted earlier from the **DIDACHE**, is similarly interpreted by Justin, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Augustine, and other early Fathers, and has always been understood as referring to the Eucharistic celebration.

There are numerous other references to the Eucharistic celebration from the Church's formative years. As is to be expected, the earliest references are the scantiest, but they grow in number, and become more explicit as the Church came to understand its role more clearly.

From our vantage point at this late date, we can look back over our history and see the development of doctrine and worship; we can see the formation of the Christian communities, and how the people of God lived their faith.

They suffered the same troubles and trials that afflict us today, and the same insidious attacks from inside and outside their communities.

They had their troubles, and they had to fight to defend the truths that had been handed down to them. But they also had their champions: men and women whom God sent to them in their time of need to fearlessly proclaim the Christian message, and to give us an example to follow by their lives of faith.

And their names and their deeds have not been forgotten; they are still remembered, and their writings are still read today. We have looked at a few of them, and listened, in this instance, to what they had to say on the liturgy. But their witness covers so much more of the Christian message. Justin Martyr, for example, whom I quoted earlier, also describes the way in which baptism was administered; he reminds the Christians of their obligations to civil authorities; he speaks of pagan gods, and the one true God; he speaks of the Incarnation of the Son of God who had been "born 150 years ago"; and, if I may be permitted to digress for a moment, he even presents a strong defense against **Jehovah's Witnesses of today**, who insist that Christ died on an upright stake, and who denounce as pagan, anyone who believes that he died on the generally accepted form of a cross. He writes:

"Think for a moment, and ask yourself if the business of the world could be carried out without the figure of a cross. The sea cannot be crossed unless this sign of victory - the mast - remains unharmed. Without it there would be no ploughing; neither diggers nor mechanics can do their work without tools of this shape. The human figure is distinguished from that of the brute beast solely by having an upright position and the ability to extend their arms; also by the nose, which is set at right-angles to the brow, and displays just the shape of the cross. . . . and the standards in use among you display the power

of this figure (I mean the legionary ensigns [eagles with out-stretched wings], and trophy poles [with cross-bars from which depended captured arms] which accompany your processions everywhere as symbols of power and dominion." (Justin Martyr, **FIRST APOLOGY**, 55)

What I am trying to do here by quoting from these early accounts is to show that the practices of the 2nd and 3rd Century Christians were no different from those of the 1st Century, and that Catholic practices today, are no different to those of the 2nd and 3rd Centuries. The external forms may have changed over the centuries, but the essentials are still there. The important things have not changed.

Those who dismiss the early Christian witness of Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and the other Fathers of the Church, are destroying the very foundations on which they have built their faith.

The principal writers of the early Church lived in the years immediately after the New Testament period, and followed on from the apostles. Their writings may not be inspired or infallible, but they are our first link with the Apostolic Church.

If it were not for the likes of these early writers of the Church, we would not know how the Church functioned; how the early Christians worshipped; their form of prayers; their courage in face of persecution; and the constant battles against the insidious heresies that threatened the Church from within

and without.

Now we **CAN** dismiss these writers; we **CAN** cast aside all the historical records as of no account; we **CAN** refuse to accept any testimony from any source other than the Bible, but if we do, we are cutting off the body at the legs. There is no foundation; there is no support; there is no link.

In a letter I received several years ago, the writer told me he gave no credence to the early Christian writers. He would occasionally quote from them - if they lent support to his case, but he gave them no other weight or authority. As far as he was concerned, he had the Scriptures, and he would be none the poorer if these other early works had never been written.

However, try as one might, it is not possible to sweep aside our past history, which includes the Apostolic Fathers, the early Christian writers, and the later General Councils. They are part of our history. We can't brush them aside to begin all over again with a New Testament type of faith which excludes two thousand years of history.

This is what many of today's churches attempt to do. Even the "Born-Again" Christians, who rely exclusively on the Bible, have little time for the writers of the past. They have little to do with the Fathers of the Church, and would prefer to think that they never existed.

They would much rather prefer to have their faith begin with the Old Testament and end with the New Testament. Nothing before, nothing after! As far as they are concerned, there

is nothing else. They are the "People of the Book." The "Book" being the Bible. They identify themselves with the people of the Book, forgetting that they are as far removed in custom and time as the east is from the west.

It is like a National Day. A centennial celebration, when the people dress in period costumes, ride around in horse-drawn coaches, roast their meat on a spit, and generally try to re-enact the scenes of yesterday.

But there **is no** going-back. Even the world of a century ago is lost forever. The industrial revolution, the invention of the telephone, the motor car and the airplane ushered us into an altogether new world that our great, great grand-parents never even dreamed about.

We can dress up and play our little games of make-believe, but at the end of the day we come back to reality. We come back to our own time.

It is the same with Christianity. This rejection of our past history, which the early writers preserved for us; this attempt to go back even further and to identify oneself with people who lived two thousand and more years ago, is not the Christianity of reality. It is an ostrich mentality that seeks to bury one's head in the sand and deny any connection or relationship with the Church of the past. It's a "Topsy" outlook where one lives in a "now" situation. A back to the basics: The New Testament and **NOW**, with nothing in between. No Fathers of the Church - no Clement, Justin, Ignatius, or Irenaeus. No great Doctors or theologians of the Church, such as Gregory,

Ambrose, Augustine, or Jerome. No great Councils of the Church, such as Nicaea, Constantinople, Ephesus, or Chalcedon. No persecution under the Roman Emperors. No defense of the faith against the endless parade of heretics. And no fearless proclamation of the Word of God in foreign countries.

But all this is history! All this is Christianity; growing under the influence of the Holy Spirit **alive** in the Church. We cannot deny it; we cannot dismiss it. We cannot cast it aside and say that this **was** the Church of yesteryear, and that it has no relevance for us today. Nor, can we say that mistakes were made in the early Church, and that from time to time the Church fell into error and taught such doctrines as a divinely-guided Church that is preserved free from error; that the bishops of Rome who succeeded Peter exercise a primacy within the Church, and were looked upon to settle disputed questions; that the Church founded by Christ had been given power to forgive sins; that Jesus was truly present in the Eucharistic bread and wine, and worthy of adoration; and that the Church through its councils and pronouncements finally settled the matter as to which books of the Bible were to be accepted as the Word of God.

The Church has not fallen into error - then or now. Christ's promise to be with his Church until the end of time (Mt 28:20) precludes our acceptance of this possibility. If the Church **could** fall into error and teach such falsehoods, we could never know, from one day to the next, when we were in truth or error.

God is not a God of confusion. (1 Cor 14:33) He has not set up a means for us to come to the truth and to bring us to eternal life, only to allow us to be misled and fall into error.

Nor can one say, for example, that it does not **really** matter if one believes that Christ is truly present in a literal way in the Eucharist, or that he is only present in a symbolic way. Not only has a real Eucharistic Presence of Christ always been accepted by Christianity, but it has been infallibly pronounced upon at a number of General Councils of the Church, notably, that of Constance, in 1414 - 1418; at Florence, in 1439; and at Trent, in 1551.

So in the matter of whether the Church can fall into error and allow false doctrine to be taught, and for all its followers to be misled and to worship Christ present in the Eucharistic bread and wine, becomes of primary importance. By removing only **one** foundation stone, the **whole** building can collapse.

Any of the Church's doctrines can be used to explain the way in which the doctrinal foundation stones all form part of a cohesive whole. As I have already mentioned the Eucharist, I will stay with it to illustrate my point.

The Eucharist, as indeed, any doctrine, must be seen to have originated with Christ and his apostles. When it can be shown that it was indeed taught by Christ and instituted by him, it must then be traced through the Apostolic Church; through the early Church, and down through the centuries to our own time.

Somewhere along the way it will have encountered opposition. Someone, or some group, will have rejected the teaching and caused disharmony in the Church. It would have become necessary for the Church to pronounce on the doctrine, and if necessary, summon a Council to ratify its decree.

What the Church has done, in this instance, is merely restate what has always been its **constant** belief.

It is only when some individual, such as an Arius, in the case of the Holy Trinity; or a John Wycliffe, in the case of the Eucharist, comes forward to deny a particular doctrine, that the Church finds it necessary to pronounce infallibly on that doctrine to allay confusion in the minds of its children who may be swayed by specious arguments that have never been a part of the historical Church's teaching.

When the Church is called upon to pronounce infallibly on a particular doctrine, it reaches back into its past. It draws upon centuries of learning. It listens to what was taught by Christ himself and his apostles as recorded in the Sacred Scriptures. It listens to the great Fathers of the Apostolic Church; to the early Church; to the Ecumenical Councils; and it can truly say: "This is the faith."

The early Church knew then what had been handed down from Christ and his apostles, and it knows now that it is still teaching the same truths.

No one, outside the Catholic Church, who denies **any** of the doctrines of the Catholic Church, can accept that the Church has retained its teachings unchanged; intact. For the logical

question would be: "Why don't you belong to it?" For this reason, every Catholic doctrine and teaching which is not accepted outside of the Catholic Church has to be challenged and denied.

But there must be continuity of faith. Christ founded a Church for all time. Those who do not accept or belong to this Church will deny that any such continuity is necessary. They can scarcely do otherwise. But to do this is to deny reality.

There is a Church founded by Christ in the world today. It has been in the world since the time of Christ. It is conscious of its birth from Christ. It is conscious of all its past history - the high points, and the low points.

It knows its saints, and it knows its sinners. But it also knows that in spite of all the human qualities, the faults and failings that might mar its image in the eyes of many outsiders, it still has its identity. It still has its link with the apostles, and there must always be that continual effort to build up the Body of Christ from within, so that it will shine forth as a light to all, and outsiders will see it as the "city on the mountain"; (cf. Mt 5:14) the Church of the living God; the pillar and foundation of truth. (1 Tim 3:15)

Thank you for your kind attention.

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE PAPACY**

BY

JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

Greetings!

In a previous talk dealing with the Testimony of History for the Catholic Church, I mentioned that it was one of the most hotly debated areas of discussion in Christianity today. During the course of that talk, I also touched upon the Eucharistic celebration, which Catholics generally refer to as "the Mass," and stated that it was, perhaps, **the** major

point of departure between Catholic and non-Catholic forms of worship.

In this particular talk we again enter the field of controversy as I discuss the Catholic Church and the Papacy. And there is no more controversial issue between Catholics and Protestants than that surrounding the question of the Pope. Such matters as Peter the Rock, apostolic succession, papal infallibility, and the immoral lives of some of the popes cause conflict and hostility whenever they are mentioned.

Catholics can speak of these issues dispassionately. The question of Peter the "Rock" is not dependent on one or two isolated Scripture texts; the whole issue of apostolic succession is a fact of history; the matter of papal infallibility has been settled once and for all by a General Council of the Church; and the scandals surrounding the lives of some of the popes show just how human they were.

But when all these issues are discussed by someone outside the Catholic Church, it is hard to remain objective. They have their roots going back to the Reformation when they were fiercely debated and the subject of violent clashes. Although the controversy has mellowed somewhat over the years, in some circles time has only served to harden the attitude against the papacy and everything it stands for.

I want to make it perfectly clear here that I am not setting out to attack Protestants in this talk. For the most part, they are unconcerned with the papacy. For many of them, it is simply an oddity that has outlived its usefulness. For others, the office has possibilities. Some of them would even be prepared, under certain conditions, to accept the pope as a form of president or leader in a united Church.

These groups are the "mainline" Protestants, people of good will who are just as much hurt by the lies and slander that are spread around, as are Catholics themselves. They hold to the majority of orthodox doctrines, but differ on such questions as the papacy, the sacraments, the priesthood and the like.

It is the hard-core or hard-line Protestants that I tend to group with Jehovah's Witnesses in this talk, and a comparison between the type of literature that comes from their presses will quickly show the similarities between the two.

Again, I am not attacking personalities or beliefs as such, but the twisted mentality of fanatical people who masquerade under the banner of Christianity.

I am not lacking in charity. While acknowledging the great progress in ecumenism, I must also acknowledge the resurgence of militant anti-Catholicism that has nothing whatsoever to do with true Christianity. Its whole reason for existence seems to be to tear down, discredit and destroy the Catholic Church. Now one cannot stand idly by while endless criticism and abuse is poured out on the pope and the Catholic Church in this sort of literature.

It might be suggested that it would be better to ignore it and let it pass, but if we were to substitute parents or husband or wife or other members of our families in place of the pope or the Catholic Church, and have this abuse hurled at them, perhaps we would not be so complacent.

The type of literature that refers to the pope and the Catholic Church as the "Anti-Christ"; the "Beast of Revelation"; and the "whore of Babylon" harks back to an attitude of yesteryear that would best be forgotten. But, with some Christians, this is not possible.

Now if the question of the papacy can cause so much controversy among Protestants, then how much more among Jehovah's Witnesses?

The Witnesses owe their beginnings to Charles Taze Russell, and this former Pittsburg draper gathered many of his early ideas from Adventism. Adventism, in turn, had its origins from the Methodist revivalist movement which swept through America towards the middle of the 18th Century. So, as much as they may see themselves as a unique God-raised people, the present-day Witnesses still retain many of the traits that betray their Protestant heritage.

Looking back over the past history of the Watchtower, one is not a little surprised to see some of the vehemence with which the Witnesses have denounced Protestantism. And yet, even today, a Jehovah's Witness will be quick to deny any link with the Reformers of the past.

The Witnesses have made every effort to cover their tracks. Although at times they have condescendingly spoken of the Reformation, they point out that it did not go far enough in its reforms.

Today, Protestantism merits the same condemnation as the Catholic Church. In the 1981 Watchtower book, **LET YOUR KINGDOM COME**, Protestantism and the Reformation are dismissed in the space of a single paragraph. Under the heading "What of Protestantism?" we read:

At midday, October 31, 1517, Roman Catholic priest Martin Luther nailed 95 theses of protest to the church door at Whittenberg, Germany. The Protestant Reformation was under way. However, rather than bring a return to pure Christian doctrine and sacred service to God, the

Reformation became largely political. Territorial gains were sought through fighting religious wars, such as the 30 Years' War of 1618 - 1648 in Europe, in which millions of lives were lost. Many countries set up their state religions, and these continued to teach Catholicism's key doctrines, such as the immortality of the soul, a hellfire of torment, the Trinity, infant baptism and many others. They remain in bondage to these teachings of the great apostasy right down to this present day. (Pp. 93-94)

This curt treatment of Protestantism is typical of the Witnesses' treatment of the effects of the Reformation. The same sort of approach appears in the 1963 book, **BABYLON THE GREAT HAS FALLEN** (pp. 494 - 498), and in issue after issue of the **WATCHTOWER** and **AWAKE**.

What the Witnesses are doing is echoing similar objections which were being voiced by Charles Russell over one hundred years ago.

In various **WATCHTOWER** issues of 1889, the then-Bible students were being told that Protestantism had lost its way. That it was losing its **protest**; that its influence was waning; and that it was bowing to the papacy.

One of the earliest characteristics of the Protestant Reformation; one which is among its chief reasons for existence, is its protestation against the person and authority of the pope.

More than four hundred and sixty years ago, in Germany, the reformers proclaimed their acceptance of the Bible as the only source of revealed truth; the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and the universal priesthood of all believers. Using the Bible as their sole authority they swept aside 1500

years of history; 1500 years of unity of belief, and abolished the Mass and all the sacraments, with the exception of baptism and the Eucharist - the latter becoming almost unrecognizable.

In just fifty years, the Reformation had spread throughout the western world, and had large areas of England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, Hungary, Poland, Austria and the Netherlands under its influence. The reformers loudly proclaimed their freedom from Rome and their right to interpret the Bible for themselves.

In the harsh light of reality, the new-found freedom simply meant exchanging one kind of authority for another; and this latter authority was by no means as tolerant and understanding as was thought. The states imposed their own rules and systems of belief, and conformity became the order of the day.

But through it all, they continued to **protest**, and always prominent in these protests was the condemnation of the pope and all that he stood for.

Even today, now nearly five centuries later, this denunciation is still voiced abroad, and the pope is still the target for all manner of attack. This is no exaggeration. I have before me Watchtower and Protestant publications that highlight the evils of the papacy, and the threat it poses to world freedom.

This is a form of paranoia and extremism that is out of touch with reality. It cannot be reasoned with, nor can it be objective. There is little that can be done against such an attitude, and there is little point in trying.

But, as I have said in earlier talks, I am addressing myself to **former** Witnesses who have been fortunate enough to see through the errors of the Watchtower, and have come to realize that what the Watchtower teaches is not Christianity. There are

**also many**, still under the Watchtower influence, who have difficulty in reconciling some of the Witnesses' teachings with the Bible. There **are** obvious contradictions that fail to receive satisfactory answers from Watchtower sources, and this leads to doubt and confusion and can eventually lead to one breaking free of Watchtower domination and becoming receptive to a more orthodox form of Christianity.

Now a "more orthodox form of Christianity" is not necessarily **true** Christianity. There **may** be more **truth** in one denomination than in another, but that does not necessarily make it true. Jesus laid down guidelines for his Church, and the apostles built on them. A person who wishes to become a Christian - in the strict sense of the word, is not at liberty to pick and choose what teachings or doctrines they are going to accept.

There **cannot** be more than **one** true Church of Christ, and anybody who chops and changes their church to suit their own particular whim or fancy or their advancement of belief, or for any other reason, should **seriously** take stock of what they are doing.

The Church can be likened to the parable of Jesus when he spoke of the "pearl of great price," (Mt 13:46) which the merchant purchased by selling everything he owned to possess it. The pearl stood out from all the rest because of its beauty. There was nothing like it. It was peerless. The other pearls also had beauty and character, but there was something they lacked. Only one had the flawless quality that stood it apart from the rest. And this is the Church of Christ; the kingdom of the Son of Man. (Mt 13:41)

The Church of the living God, which is the "pillar and foundation of truth," (1 Tim 3:15) is necessarily **one**. It cannot

be otherwise. For he is "not a God of confusion." (1 Cor 14:33)

Jesus founded a Church, and however much some may wish to deny it, there were some who were given positions of authority **within** the Church. Paul makes this clear when he speaks of the various ministries in the Church: "First, apostles; second, prophets; third, teachers; then mighty deeds; then gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues." (1 Cor 12:28) He goes on to speak of a still more better way. The ministries are good and necessary, but they existed solely to build up the Church in love, not to lord it over the members.

In Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians, he writes that it would have been easy to "impose our weight as apostles of Christ," (1 Thess 2:7) but rather, they (that is, Paul and his companions) were "gentle among you, as a nursing mother cares for her children."

His attitude is that of care and concern for the flock. But that does not mean that he will stand idly by and permit wolves to ravage the flock. He had been appointed by God as an apostle (1 Cor 1:1) and he reminds the churches under his care that he writes in a gentle manner, "so that when I come, I may not have to be **severe** in virtue of the **authority** that the Lord has given me to build up and not to tear down." (2 Cor 13:10)

Paul has **authority** from God, but he still speaks of himself as a "servant" (or slave) "of God." (Rom 1:1) Even though in authority, he writes that he is "servant to all." (1 Cor 9:19) And in our own time, the popes of today who are also in authority, speak of themselves as "servants of the servants of God."

Now this is **not** an empty title; nor is it without meaning. Jesus spoke of the role of the apostles at the Last Supper,

and he told them, "the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader, as the servant." (Lk 22:26)

In the minds of many, today, this picture of the pope as **serving** the people under his care is unbelievable. Jehovah's Witnesses and hard-line Protestants are subjected to a constant barrage of anti-papal literature that has set up the pope as a dictatorial despot who is totally immoral, and whose sole aim is to extend his empire to gain absolute control over the world.

Some of the unrestrained descriptions by former leaders of the Watchtower have been toned down in more recent years, and today the Watchtower generally avoids such outlandish statements as those made by Judge Rutherford:

The Roman Catholic hierarchy claims the right and power to control and rule the world, and it exercises this rule over almost all of 'Christendom. '

And, in the following paragraph, he continues:

. . . For centuries the Roman Catholic organization has claimed the divine right to rule the nations of the earth, and based upon such false claim, that wicked organization has attempted to control the political affairs of all the nations of earth. (**RICHES**, p. 242)

Similar statements appear in many Protestant publications. A small booklet, recently republished by the Protestant Truth Society of London, titled, **THE PAPACY, ITS HISTORY AND DOGMAS**, by Leopold D.E. Smith, describes the aims of Catholicism:

The object of the papacy is, in brief, to exalt a man, or rather a class of men, to the supreme, undivided, and absolute control of the world and its affairs. The popes grasped the reins of secular as well as ecclesiastical jurisdiction. (P. 19)

In a more extensive work, but still retaining the same anti-Catholic outlook, the American Protestant theologian, Dr. Loraine Boettner, writes:

Thus the Roman Church holds that the pope, as the vicar of Christ on Earth, is the **ruler of the world**, supreme not only over the Roman Church itself but over all kings, presidents, and civil rulers, indeed over all peoples and nations. (ROMAN CATHOLICISM, pp. 127, 128)

These are typical statements that one continues to read over and over again in Watchtower and hard-core Protestant publications. And they are the sort of statements that continue to influence Jehovah's Witnesses who may be wrestling with Watchtower inconsistencies, but at the same time, have been, and are being indoctrinated against everything Catholic.

The pope is pictured as the arch-enemy of freedom; an autocratic ruler who dominates the minds, the hearts, and the actions of Catholics everywhere.

Now this caricature is never seen for what it is. Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants would prefer to accept this distorted image of the pope as fulfilling such Scriptural prophecies as the "son of perdition"; "the anti-Christ," and "the man of sin," rather than take the trouble to dig below the surface crust that centuries of controversy and distrust have formed over

the whole subject of the papacy.

If we are to understand the role of the pope in the Church, it is necessary to go back to the beginning and examine the claims of the Catholic Church and the papacy, to see if there is any substance to its insistence that Christ actually set up a hierarchical structure to govern his Church with the pope at the head.

The 16th Century Reformers rejected any special priesthood or hierarchy and accepted instead a general priesthood of all the faithful. However, the 19th Ecumenical or General Council of the Catholic Church, held at Trent, a town just outside of Italy, on the road to Germany, convened in 1545. Owing to circumstances of the time there were two major interruptions to the work of the Council, resulting in three distinct periods, comprising 25 sessions, spread over some eighteen years.

The Council decreed that there was a hierarchy instituted by divine ordinance, and over the intervening years this decree has been strengthened by other pronouncements, such as that of Pope Pius X, who condemned the proposition of the Modernists that the Church hierarchy is the result of historical development.

There is a wealth of Scriptural evidence for the establishment of a hierarchy in the Church. Paul speaks of having "received the grace of apostleship, to bring about the obedience of faith, for the sake of his name, among all the Gentiles." (Rom 1:5)

The apostles were the "ambassadors for Christ"; (2 Cor 5:20) they were chosen by Christ; (Jn 15:16) and were sent out by Christ. (Jn 20:21) They were given legislative or disciplinary powers (Mt 18:18) and their decrees were to be accepted as if coming from Christ himself. And finally,

Christians were cautioned to "obey your leaders and defer to them, for they keep watch over you and will have to give an account." (Heb 13:17)

All the apostles were commissioned and sent out by Christ (Mt 28:16-20), but at the same time, one of the apostles, namely, Peter, was also chosen for a special role among the Twelve. It is here that controversy really enters the picture.

Apart from Congregationalist-style churches, the acceptance of overall authority is not an issue. The real problem comes when one person is singled out to possess this authority jointly **and** individually. The Catholic Church has always maintained that this authority resides in the bishops of the Church as successors to the apostles, and in a special way in the pope as the successor of Peter.

Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants alike reject this teaching, and in their efforts to disprove any idea of primacy in Peter, usually end up downgrading his person.

But this was not always the way. We are looking at a relatively recent repudiation of an office that existed for fifteen hundred years before it was rejected and condemned. It had withstood the assaults of kings and emperors and states and countries since the time of Christ, and it is still standing today, despite the prophecies of doom from its enemies.

In some of its earliest issues, the Watchtower predicted the end of the papacy. In the December, 1881 issue, for example, the question was asked if the papacy was going to be destroyed. The answer was:

Yes [the] Papacy has been losing its power gradually: The Spanish Inquisition, the last of its kind, was abolished in 1870. We understand from Scripture that the Lord is

now **present** gathering or separating from the nominal mass of christians, **the Bride** - some from the sleeping and some from the living generation of the church. These will soon all be associated with him in kingdom work, the first part of which will be the overthrow of all **injustice, oppression,** and **error** and consequently the **overthrow** of all the systems and institutions which uphold these. (WATCHTOWER, December, 1881, p. 7)

Jehovah's Witnesses condemn everything connected with the papacy. And, whereas the papacy is one of the major sources of contention between Catholicism and Protestantism, the Witnesses see it simply as one more teaching to be condemned in Christendom.

The best-known text that is used to highlight the special place accorded to Peter is that of Matthew 16:13-19. Now Jehovah's Witnesses and many Protestants seem to think that if they can weaken the strength of this particular passage, they can cut the ground from under the feet of Catholicism.

Dr. Boettner, whom I quoted earlier, very forcefully states: "The whole structure of the Roman Church is built on the assumption that in Matthew 16:13-19 Christ appointed Peter the first pope and so established the papacy. Disprove the primacy of Peter, and the foundation of the papacy is destroyed. Destroy the papacy, and the whole Roman hierarchy topples with it." (ROMAN CATHOLICISM, P. 105)

Matthew 16:13-19 may be the clearest and most decisive text to establish the primacy of Peter, but it is certainly not the only one. Luke 22:31-32 records the words of Jesus at the Last Supper, when he foretold that Peter would deny

knowing him:

"Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."

All the apostles are going to be sifted by Satan, but it is Peter alone - in the singular - who is going to re-enforce the faith of his fellow apostles. The use of the singular in this passage is borne out in the Witnesses' own **NEW WORLD TRANSLATION**, where the "you" is in lower case letters, indicating that it is singular - referring to Peter alone.

In John 21:15-17, Jesus, after his resurrection, conferred the primacy on Peter, and commissioned him to "feed his lambs, and to feed his sheep" - that is, to be the shepherd over the whole flock.

Three texts! Hardly enough to build a whole hierarchy on. And yet, if it were not for the attempts to deprecate Peter and his position among the apostles, even **one** of these texts would be enough on which to base a case for primacy. One text used is as much the Word of God as another, and, providing it is clear, and not contradicted by anything else in the teachings of Jesus, it has the same binding force as the rest of the Scriptures.

It **is** unfortunate that the attempts to discredit the primacy of Peter usually end up reducing him to an even more inferior position than the rest of the apostles. But in reality, such is **not** the case. Peter is mentioned nearly **200** times in the New Testament. As "Simon Bar Jona" he is named 45 times, and as "Peter," 150 times. The next most frequently named apostle

is John, and he is mentioned 29 times.

The significance of the name change from Simon to Peter, and the whole controversy over the "Rock" issue is discussed a little later.

When we pause to look at some of the occasions where Peter is spoken of in the New Testament, we find so many other reasons for accepting a special place for him among the apostles:

1. It was Peter whom Jesus called upon to walk on the water. (Mt 14:28-29)
2. It was Peter who sought to prevent the soldiers from arresting Jesus. (Jn 18:10)
3. It was Peter who received the first news from the angel that Jesus had risen. (Mk 16:7)
4. It is Peter who dominates the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles, which chronicle the growth of the Christian community in Jerusalem.
5. It was Peter who presided over the election of Matthias. (Acts 1:15)
6. It was Peter who first preached the Gospel to the Jews. (Acts 2:14)
7. It was Peter who performed the first miracle in Jesus' name when he healed the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. (Acts 3:1)
8. It was Peter who received the vision to accept Gentiles into the Church. (Acts 10)
9. It was Peter who finally settled the dispute at the council of Jerusalem. (Acts 15)
10. And finally, it was to Peter that Paul came after his conversion, and remained for fifteen days. (Gal 1:8)

In themselves, each of these incidents may be explained away as having no great significance; but when they are all viewed together, and seen in the light of the three Gospel passages which I mentioned earlier, then there is more than enough evidence to accept that Peter did indeed have a special place among the apostles.

Of course, it is possible to admit that he may have had a **special** place among the apostles, but at the same time deny that it was in any way a **primacy** of place that would be carried over to his successors. And this is precisely the argument used by Jehovah's Witnesses and those Protestants who follow this line of reasoning.

When the Reformers denied that the Mass was a true sacrifice and a renewal of the same sacrifice Christ had offered on Calvary, they started a chain reaction that transformed the Church that had existed for fifteen hundred years.

With no true sacrifice to offer at the altar, there was no need for a priesthood. This led to a rejection of any visible hierarchy of bishops, and a denunciation of the papacy.

But the Church Christ founded was to last for all time (Mt 28:20); and this promise presupposes some organized authority. This is borne out in the words of Jesus. He **chose** certain men: "It was not you who chose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain." (Jn 15:16) And he gave them their mission: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." (Jn 20:21) This mission was to: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Mt 28:19)

This authority, given to the apostles, was handed on to

others. Paul, for example, handed on his powers to Timothy (1 Tim 4:11-14) and to Titus. (Tit 1:5) The word to Titus was that he might "set right what remains to be done and appoint presbyters in every town, as I directed you."

Thus the work was to go on; the Church was to grow; and in this Church there was to be authority: "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me, rejects the one who sent me." (Lk 10:16)

No one was free to believe what they wanted, for we read in the Acts of the Apostles that they "devoted themselves to the **teaching** of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers." (Acts 2:42)

The life of the Church had to go on. There had to be successors to the apostles; so towards the end of the First Century, about 96 A.D., we read in Clement of Rome:

Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife over the name of the bishop's office. So for this reason, since they had perfect foreknowledge, they appointed the aforesaid persons and subsequently gave them permanence, so that, if they should fall asleep, other approved men should succeed to their ministry. Men, therefore, who were appointed by the apostles, or subsequently by other eminent men with the approval of the whole Church. (Clement's **LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS**, 44:1)

This appointment of bishops had begun with the apostles themselves, and in every town they chose men of good standing, and appointed them to this special office.

Irenaeus, who was bishop of Lyons, and who died around

the year 200 A.D., speaks of the record of apostolic succession of bishops of **all** the important Eastern and Western churches. He states that it was possible to list them all, but he then writes:

It would be excessively tedious, in a book of this kind, to give detailed lists of the successors in all the churches. Therefore, we will refute those who hold unauthorized assemblies - either because of self-importance, or pride, or blindness and perversity - by pointing to the tradition of the greatest and oldest church, a church known to all men, which was founded and established at Rome by the most renowned apostles, Peter and Paul. This tradition the Church has from the apostles, and this faith has been proclaimed to all men, and has come down to our own day through the succession of bishops. (**EARLY CHRISTIAN FATHERS**, pp. 90-91)

What Irenaeus then does is list the bishops of Rome from Peter down to his own day - the first twelve bishops, to about 180 A.D.

It is important, here, to realize that the office of Pope is actually that of the bishop of Rome. A person becomes pope when he becomes bishop of Rome.

Any discussion on the primacy of the pope and the infallibility of the pope invariably brings up the question as to whether Peter was ever in Rome, and the significance of Rome. The two questions are actually one. The significance or importance of Rome is due to the fact that in spite of statements to the contrary, the apostle Peter came to the Imperial City. He established the Church there, and as bishop

of Rome, he was martyred there. His successors, from Linus onward, all became bishops of Rome. That is, they have been appointed to that office, and derive their authority from their appointment as bishops and successors of Peter.

A second point to be noted, is that of the pride of place accorded to the Roman See. In the **AID** book, pp. 1298-1299, Jehovah's Witnesses deny that Peter was ever in Rome.

Peter, in his First Letter (1 Pet 5:13), states that he is writing from "Babylon," and, until Martin Luther, in his book written in 1545, and titled, **AGAINST THE ROMAN PAPACY INSTITUTED BY THE DEVIL**, tried to prove that Peter was never in Rome, "Babylon" was always understood as a cryptic reference to the Imperial City.

The 1969 **AID** Book announces that "available evidence clearly shows that 'Babylon' refers to the city on the Euphrates, and not to Rome, as some have claimed." (**AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING**, p. 1298) And yet, in the more recent **REASONING** book, the Witnesses seem to be a little less sure:

Rome is referred to in nine verses of the Holy Scriptures; none of these say that Peter was there. First Peter 5:13 shows that he was in Babylon. Was this a cryptic reference to Rome? (**REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, 1985, p. 41)

In the still more recent book, **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, a two volume encyclopedic work that eclipses the **AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING** book, the Witnesses quote a number of authorities and revert to their previous position of more forcefully denying any symbolism or reference to Rome in the New Testament use of Babylon. (**INSIGHT**, p. 240)

Now when we go back to Irenaeus, the "available evidence" presents an entirely different picture. He was a disciple of Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, who was martyred around 156 A.D., and who was himself a disciple of the apostle John. So Irenaeus was writing little more than a century after Peter's own martyrdom around 63/64 A.D. He writes:

For this Church (the Church of Rome) has a position of leadership and authority; and therefore every church, that is, the faithful everywhere, must needs agree with the church at Rome; for in her the apostolic tradition has been preserved by the faithful from all parts of the world. The blessed Apostles, after they had founded and built the church at Rome, handed over to Linus the office of Bishop. Paul mentions this Linus in his Letters to Timothy. (2 Tim 4:21) He was succeeded by Anacletus, after whom Clement was appointed to the bishopric, third in order from the apostles. He not only had seen the blessed Apostles, but had conferred with them, and had their preaching still ringing in his ears, and their tradition still before his eyes. In this he was not alone; for many still survived who had been taught by the Apostles. Now while Clement was bishop there arose a considerable dispute among the brethren in Corinth. And the church at Rome sent a very weighty letter to the Corinthians, to urge them to reconciliation, to renew their faith, and to tell them of the tradition recently received from the Apostles. . . . Euarestus succeeded Clement; Alexander followed Euarestus; then Sixtus [Xystus] was appointed, the sixth in order from the Apostles; then Telesphorus, who had a glorious martyrdom; then Hyginus; then Pius;

after him Anicetus; he was succeeded by Soter; and now Eleutherus occupies the see, the twelfth from the Apostles. In this order and succession the Apostolic tradition in the church and the preaching of the truth has come down to our time. (**AGAINST HERESIES**, c. 3)

Irenaeus was not a Westerner. He was born in Asia Minor, in what is now Turkey, around the year 130 A.D.; but he was a Catholic, and he lived and died in communion with Rome. He was particularly scathing on those who sought to bring disharmony into the Church. His book, actually a collection of books, **AGAINST HERESIES**, really bears the title, **THE REFUTATION OF FALSE GNOSIS** [or False Wisdoms], and is primarily an expose of the then-current Gnostic fantasies which swept through the Church about this time. He was chiefly concerned to establish the claims of the Catholic Church, and to trace its authority back to the apostles.

He insists that the Church has a "rule of faith," and he writes: "Those who wish to see the truth can observe in every church the tradition of the apostles made manifest in the whole world. We can enumerate those who were appointed bishops in the churches by the apostles, and their successors down to our day. They never taught and never knew of such absurdities as those heretics produce." (**AGAINST HERESIES**, Ch. 3)

This, then, is Irenaeus. But what of other early witnesses? Tertullian, for example, the African-born anti-Gnostic champion, died about the year 220 A.D. He poured all his energies into defending the Church against the heresies of his day; but sadly, in the end, he came under the influence of the Montanist sect,

which he had previously condemned. Montanism was a strict, ascetical movement, which traits appealed to the austerity of this influential apologist. During the period between his conversion from paganism to his turning to Montanism, Tertullian was well respected as an able defender of Catholicism. One of his most famous works was **DE PRAESCRPTIONE HAERETICORUM**, in which he commented on the importance of the Apostolic Church:

It is likewise clear that all doctrine which accords with these apostolic churches, the sources and origins of faith, must be reckoned as truth, since it maintains without doubt what the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God . . . We are in communion with the apostolic churches because there is no difference of doctrine. This is our guarantee of truth. But if any of these heresies are so bold as to insert themselves into the apostolic age that they may therefore appear to have been handed down from the apostles, because they existed under the apostles, we can say, 'Let them display the origins of their churches; let them unroll the list of their bishops, in unbroken succession from the beginning, so that the first bishop of theirs shall prove to have as his precursor and the source of his authority one of the apostles or one of the apostolic men, who without being an apostle, continued with the apostles.' This is how the apostolic churches report their qualifications; as the church of the Smyrnaeans relates that Polycarp was appointed by John; the church of the Romans that Clement was set up by Peter. Similarly, the

other churches also point to those whom they regard as transmitters of the apostolic seed, since they were appointed to their bishoprics by apostles.

Irenaeus and Tertullian are just two of the early witnesses to the primacy of the Roman Church. Much of our historical information on the early Church comes to us through the **ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY** of Eusebius of Caesarea. He wrote voluminously from the late 3rd Century to the early 4th Century, and quoted extensively from earlier existent works. One of his chief sources was the 2nd Century writer, Hegesippus, a converted Jew, who wrote five books of "memoirs" against the Gnostic sect. His work deals mainly with the Jerusalem Church, and, if the succession list of Roman bishops beginning with Peter, which is reproduced by Epiphanius in his **PANARION**, commonly known as the **REFUTATION OF ALL HERESIES**, is indeed a copy of the Hegesippian list, then it is the earliest known witness to the names of the first Roman bishops.

Eusebius tells us [I am quoting first from **ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY**; then a quote within a quote from Hegesippus]:

Hegesippus, in the five short works that have come into my hands, has left a very full account of his own beliefs. In them he describes how, when traveling as far as Rome, he mixed with a number of bishops and found the same doctrine among them all. Listen to what he appends to some remarks about Clement's **EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS**:  
'The Corinthian church continued in the true doctrine until Primus became bishop. I mixed with them on my voyage to Rome and spent several days with the Corinthians, during

which we were refreshed with the true doctrine. On arrival at Rome I pieced together the succession down to Anicetus, whose deacon was Eleutherus, Anicetus being succeeded by Soter and he by Eleutherus. In every line of bishops and in every city things accord with the preaching of the Law, the Prophets, and the Lord. ' (Eusebius, **ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY**, Book 4:22)

So, from the earliest times, it has always been important to be able to show the line of apostolic succession. In a way, we can be thankful for some of the heresies that sprang up in the early Church, for it was because of these disputes that it was found necessary to defend the Church; to defend its doctrines, and to highlight its authority. And to highlight its authority, they went back to the beginning; they went back to Christ and his apostles and traced the line of succession through them to the present day.

An important point to notice here is that these early witnesses to the apostolic succession have no axe to grind. They are simply stating facts; what was common knowledge in their day.

From time to time some of the Protestant churches attempt to exalt the apostle James, who is mentioned as leader of the Church in Jerusalem, as the supreme bishop or head of the Church. But this is merely a smoke screen. There is certainly no wish or desire to elevate James to a position where we should be tracing the apostolic succession back through him, because there is again, the question of authority, which is denounced by so many Protestants. No, it is done at the expense of Peter.

There is a wish to depreciate the position of the Bishop of Rome, so James is exalted and is put forward as the leader of the Church at the time.

There may be objections that the evidence for Peter's primacy is lacking; that there is insufficient evidence; that it is partial or biased evidence - but then, remember that we are not dealing with yesterday's news that has been preserved for us on video tape, on audio tape, or in newspapers, and all the other modern means of communication. We are looking at a period nearly two thousand years ago. We are looking at a period that is separated from us by wars and strife that have wiped out whole civilizations, and we are indeed fortunate to even have any information from this period at all. So if the information is lacking, then we can be thankful that what we do have is authentic and has preserved for us the belief and the practice of the early Church.

#### **THE QUESTION OF PETER THE "ROCK"**

Now there are still a couple of peripheral questions that raise their heads from time to time in discussions on the papacy, and the first of these concerns Peter as the "Rock" on which Christ built his Church.

To understand the controversy that has grown up around the question of the primacy of Peter, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the background to the dispute.

In Protestant circles - and I emphasize again, that I am talking mainly of the hard-line Protestant Fundamentalist groups

who are the most vocal opponents to any talk of re-approachment with Rome - the **major** Scriptural text, and, in the minds of many of them, the **only** Scriptural text that bears upon the subject, is that of Matthew 16:13-19, which contains the famous Petrine statement, where Peter is called the "rock" on which Christ is going to build his Church. But before that, Simon Bar Jona had already had his name changed to Peter, and it was only after the apostle's profession of faith in Jesus as "the Son of the living God" that the reason for the name change was revealed.

At his first meeting with Jesus (Jn 1:42) Simon was given a change of name and set apart from the other apostles. Although his brother Andrew had received his calling before him, and it was he who brought Simon to Jesus, yet in Matthew 10:2, Simon Peter is expressly called "the first" - first, that is, in respect of the office to which he was called.

Now this name change, and its significance, has been another source of dispute since the time of the Reformation. And what we are looking at is a further attempt to weaken the Scriptural evidence that is the basis for the primacy of Peter.

The Passage from Matthew, Chapter 16, which contains the Petrine text has been controversial only **since** the Reformation; and it is **since** the Reformation and the rejection of the pope as spiritual leader of Christ's Church on earth, that every effort has been made to cloud the issue and destroy the authority of the popes.

Dr. Walter Martin, the Baptist minister, who died recently, was well known in Protestant and cultic circles for his writings and lectures on the cults, which spanned nearly forty years.

In a series of tapes on "Roman Catholicism" he revived all the regular arguments that are used to disprove any special place for Peter.

For anyone familiar with the on-going debate, there was nothing new in the presentation; and for the most part, it was simply a re-working of material that has been put forward by the likes of Dr. Loraine Boettner and others for years.

The argument runs as follows. After quoting the text from Matthew, Dr. Boettner, for example, goes on:

Romanists quote this verse with relish, and add their own interpretation to establish their claim for papal authority. But in the Greek, the word Peter **is petros**, a person, masculine, while the word "rock," **petra** is feminine and refers not to a person but to the declaration of Christ's deity that Peter had just uttered - 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. '

Using Peter's name and making, as it were, a play upon words, Jesus said to Peter, 'You are Petros, and upon this petra I will build my church. ' (ROMAN CATHOLICISM, Pp. 105, 106)

A little further on, Dr. Boettner attempts to show the folly of pursuing this line of argument:

Had Christ intended to say that the Church would be founded on Peter, it would have been ridiculous for him to have shifted to the feminine form of the word in the middle of the statement, saying, if we may translate

literally and somewhat whimsically, 'And I say unto thee, that thou art Mr. Rock, and upon this, the Miss Rock, I will build my church. '

And, on the same page, Dr. Boettner sums up his argument by saying:

If Matthew 16:18 had been intended to teach that the Church is founded on Peter, it would have read something like this: 'Thou art Peter, and upon you I will build my church; ' or, 'Thou art Peter, and upon you the rock I will, build my church.' But that is not what Christ said. He made two complete, distinct statements. He said, 'Thou art Peter,' and, 'Upon this rock (change of gender, indicating change of subject) I will build my church.' (ROMAN CATHOLICISM, p. 106)

What Dr. Boettner is saying, as does Walter Martin in his lecture, and other Protestants **and** Jehovah's Witnesses, is that the verse does not mean what it says. Rather than accept what the Christian Church accepted for fifteen hundred years, the Reformers and their modern-day counterparts are forced into the position of proposing and accepting all manner of explanations other than that of the Catholic Church.

In Protestant circles, and because of a similar line of argument in this instance, I also include Jehovah's Witnesses, there are two major interpretations given to this particular verse in Matthew's Gospel.

Firstly:                   That "Peter" does not really mean "rock" in the sense of a solid natural mass of stone, or a firm foundation, but rather, a pebble or small stone contrasting with Christ, who was the chief cornerstone.

Secondly:                 That when Christ said "Upon this rock I will build my Church," he was referring to himself.

To answer the first point, how does one reconcile the masculine and feminine forms of Christ's declaration? As one writer recently observed, "The fact that Peter is the Rock upon which the Church was built, and that the bishops of Rome, as his successors, are the supreme authority within the Church, is, if readers will forgive the pun, a rock upon which many well-intentioned but ill-informed people come to grief."

The fact is, the difficulty which stems from the use of **Petros** and **Petra** is less real than imagined. And, if the proponents of this line of argument are **really** scholars in the strict sense of the word, then one must be inclined to question their motives.

All the writings of the New Testament were originally **written** in Greek; but this was not necessarily the **spoken** language of the people involved. And this is a fact, well-known to **all** scholars. All four Gospels, for example, were written in Greek, but Jesus and his apostles, and all the Jewish people who appear throughout the pages, spoke, not Greek, but Aramaic, which was the common language of Palestine in the time of Christ.

So when the Gospel writers record the words of Jesus they are actually **translating** Aramaic words into the common Greek. If we fail to keep this in mind when discussing Matthew's Gospel, then we can easily be led astray by the arguments that are put forward by the opponents of Catholicism.

In John 1:42 (and elsewhere) Jesus gives Simon his change of name. Henceforth he is to be called "Peter." In Aramaic, the word used is **KEPHA**. John gives a **transliteration** of the Aramaic into the Greek language in which he was writing; so the word used is **CEPHAS**.

Paul uses both forms in his letter to the Galatians. In Galatians 1:18 he **transliterates** the Aramaic word and tells us that he "went up to Jerusalem to get to know **Cephas**." Then in Galatians 2:7 he says "I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter (in Greek, **Petros**) was for the circumcised." Neither the Greek equivalent **Petros**, nor, with one isolated exception, **Kephas**, appears as a personal name before Christian times.

In Matthew 16, "Petros" and "Petra" are Greek equivalents of the Aramaic which was spoken by Jesus - without the change in gender. What Jesus would have said (speaking in Aramaic) was, "You are **Kepha**, and upon this **Kepha** I will build my church." The word being **exactly** the same on each occasion.

The second argument would have us believe that when Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build my church," he was referring not to Peter, but himself - he being the cornerstone.

Again, we have to go back to basic Biblical interpretation, to show that violence is being done to the text to try and have it say something that is simply not there.

In their recently published two-volume Bible handbook, **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, Jehovah's Witnesses also use the change of gender as an argument against seeing Peter as the rock on which Christ built his Church. Under the heading, **ROCK MASS**, the Witnesses have this to say:

This translates the Greek word **petra** (feminine gender) which designates a mass of rock . . . and therefore differs from **petros** (masculine gender and employed as a proper name, Peter), meaning 'piece of rock.' This distinction makes it clear that, when saying to Peter, 'You are Peter, and on this rock-mass I will build my congregation,' Jesus was not using synonymous terms. (p. 816)

Firstly, let us look at what Christ actually did. He deliberately changed Simon's name to Peter, which means a rock. But there was a much deeper significance in it than that. At the time, Jesus had asked his disciples their opinion about him, and it was Simon Peter who declared, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." What Jesus said to him, would have been like this, "You are **rock**, and on this **rock** I will build my church." The Hebrew, or Aramaic, word **kepha**, or its Greek transliteration, **Kephas** (or **Cephas**) being the same word in both instances.

The Greek word **Petros** which is the masculine form for Peter as a man; and **petra**, which is feminine for stone, are translations of the Aramaic, and **necessarily** change gender in accordance with the demands of the grammatical structure of

the Greek language.

Secondly, the suggestion that when Christ was speaking of the Church built on a rock, he was referring to himself as the chief cornerstone (see for example, Loraine Boettner's book, **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 106), is yet another attempt to shift the emphasis from Peter.

Nearly fifty years ago, in Sydney, Australia, the Radio Priest, the late Dr. Leslie Rumble answered this and other questions that were sent in by his listeners. One of his replies concluded:

Even from the grammatical point of view, 'this' [as in **this** rock], must refer to the nearest noun. If I said: 'Paul is an apostle, and this apostle will go to the Gentiles, ' all would know that I was not suddenly changing the reference to myself. (**RADIO REPLIES**, Vol. 2, q. 267)

No one denies that Christ is the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20) but that is no argument for denying that in Matthew's Gospel Peter is called the foundation-rock upon which Jesus is going to build his Church.

The passage from Ephesians tells us that we are "fellow citizens with the Holy Ones, and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the capstone (or cornerstone)."

Christ founded the Church. He established it and built it on the foundation of the apostles. This is quite clear from Revelation 21:14. And **he** chose Peter as the rock, or principal foundation stone. This is Catholic teaching, and this is

historical fact. It may be denied by Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants today, but it has been well attested by **all** the early Fathers of the Church from the time of the apostles themselves.

It would be a simple matter to begin listing them all here, but rather than run through them all, I have selected a representative statement from the 4th Century Scripture scholar, Jerome, the same Jerome who translated the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible. He writes:

Though I acknowledge none as first except Christ, I am joined in communion with the Chair of Peter. I know that it is upon that Rock that the Church has been built. Whoever eats the Lamb outside of this house is profane. Whoever is not in the Ark of Noah (when the Flood comes) will perish. I do not know Vitalis; I reject Meletius; I do not know Paulinus. Whoever does not gather with you, scatters.

Vitalis, Meletius, and Paulinus were just three of the many heretics who were active around the time of Jerome. What he was saying was that he wanted nothing to do with them. His allegiance was to Damasus, who was then pope.

## THE QUESTION OF INFALLIBILITY

The question of the infallibility of the pope is yet another source of controversy and misunderstanding that has bedeviled

ecumenical discussions between Protestants and Catholics since it was proclaimed an article of faith in 1870.

One of the first statements made by opponents to this doctrine is that prior to 1870, no one knew that the pope was infallible. But this is not what is being said.

The popes have always been infallible, even though, prior to 1870 there was never any full certainty of faith that they possessed this gift. It was only in the 17th Century that the question of the pope's doctrinal authority began to come under closer scrutiny as theologians argued over the extent of the teaching primacy of the pope.

There is certainly enough evidence from the earliest years of the Church to the mid-19th Century that the popes have exercised this teaching primacy of their office when the need arose; as when individual popes lent their authority to the condemnation of heresy. The 2nd Century pope, Victor I condemned Montanism, the heresy which seduced the great Tertullian; the 3rd Century pope, Callistus I, condemned Sabellianism; the 5th Century pope, Innocent I, condemned Pelagianism, and so on, right through to the mid-19 Century when the doctrine of papal infallibility was defined.

At the First Vatican Council in 1870, the Church officially defined the infallibility of the pope, and clarified the conditions under which this power could be exercised.

Now we have a whole host of issues relating to this teaching that need to be answered, and I will try and do so in an orderly manner.

The first point to be noted here concerns the Church itself. In Catholic teaching, Jesus founded a Church and has safeguarded

it from teaching error. There are those who would deny that there is any need to have a church safeguarded from error, and it would appear that they do this solely because they themselves do not have this assurance that their own churches are so safeguarded.

But belief in an infallible Church is required not only from the Scriptures, it is also required from logic.

When Christ said that he was going to "build his Church," he also stated that the "gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it." (Mt 16:18) Once again, this passage can be interpreted so as to minimize the force of its message; but in Catholic circles it has always been understood as an assurance that the Church could not fall into error.

If, at any time in its long history, the Church had fallen into error, then the "gates of the netherworld" - that is, the powers of darkness, would have prevailed.

Christ also sent out his disciples ahead of him into the towns he was to visit, and told them, "Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you, rejects me. And whoever rejects me, rejects the one who sent me." (Lk 10:16)

At the end of Mark's Gospel, which is accepted as canonical by the Catholic Church, but rejected as non-authentic by some other Christians for reasons which we cannot go into at this time, Jesus instructed the eleven apostles to, "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned." (Mk 16:15)

The Church is presented as an infallible guide to mankind - it is our way to God. It is, as the apostle Paul wrote, "The

Church of the living God; the pillar and foundation of truth."  
(1 Tim 3:15)

The Church, like the Holy Scriptures, cannot teach error. One **is** the Word of God, the other **teaches** the Word of God, constantly proclaiming it, whether it be "convenient or inconvenient," and it is to "convince, reprimand, and encourage, through all patience and teaching." (2 Tim 4:2)

These are just some of the credentials for the Church founded by Christ, and built on the apostles. It has a mission "to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you, and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age." (Mt 28:19-20)

Christ is not only **with** his Church, he **is** the Church. It is his body, "the fullness of the one who fills all things in every way." (Eph 1:22-23) He has given us his Holy Spirit to "teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you." (Jn 14:26)

If Christ is **with** his Church; and if he **is** the Church; and if his Holy Spirit is **guiding** the Church, then it cannot teach error. Christians, and all mankind are to put their trust and faith in the Church as the "pillar and foundation of truth." And this is the way Catholics see the Church, and why they do not hesitate to put their faith in the Church.

Now infallibility presides not only in the Church, but in the person of the pope. The Church, as a collective body, can, and has spoken with the full authority of Christ, as in a General Council of bishops when it defines a doctrinal teaching such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, or the divine and human

natures in Christ. But the pope, as the supreme bishop of the Church, has this infallibility in himself. This can be seen from a reading of any of the histories of the General Councils.

Of all the General Councils, and there are twenty-one of them, from Nicaea in 325 A.D., to the Second Vatican Council, which was convened as recently as 1962, any decision needed to be ratified by the pope of the time. As the late Dr. Leslie Rumble answered in a question put to him on papal infallibility:

The Catholic bishops, of whom the Pope is one, of course, have infallibility in their collective unity. But, as the Pope is the supreme bishop in the Church, this unity is procured by and derived from him. A council of bishops not confirmed by the Pope would lack infallibility. The Pope without a general Council of bishops enjoys infallibility; a Council of bishops without the Pope does not. In other words, the body of bishops, when in union with the Pope, has a confirmed infallibility. But the Pope alone has the infallibility which confirms. This is the logical application of our Lord's words to St. Peter, 'I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail, and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers. (RADIO REPLIES, Vol. III, q. 392)

A final point to be noted in relation to papal infallibility is that it does not confer on him an open invitation to suddenly start pronouncing infallibly on each and every subject on which he speaks.

The definition does not teach, nor has it ever been taught,

that the pope has been granted a special faculty that can be used at will. He is not some sort of inspired oracle who can predict the future, nor can he speak infallibly on matters outside the Church's jurisdiction.

It is only when making decisions on matters of faith and morals that will be binding on all the faithful that he is preserved from error.

The ordinary means of guiding the Church towards the fullness of faith is through the Holy Spirit working in each of us. But this does not preclude other means God has chosen to enrich the life of his Church. He has set priests and bishops over the faithful to ensure that there is always someone to turn to when doubts and troubles arise. And when doubts turn into disputes and further authoritative direction is needed, the pope is there to make a final decision.

But before the pope can make that final decision on a particular doctrine, he has to examine all the relevant information pertaining to the doctrine. He has to consult Scripture scholars, theologians, historians, philosophers, and other experts in related fields who can shed light on the subject under discussion.

Only when he has sifted this information and listened to all the pros and cons from his advisers, does the pope make that final decisive pronouncement.

As with the apostles, as related in Acts 15, it was only after the whole matter of the Gentiles had been discussed by all present, that they could say that "it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" that Gentile converts should not be burdened by Mosaic laws that had nothing to do with true

piety.

So it is only when it is a question of making a solemn definition involving the very faith of Catholics throughout the world, that the Church teaches that the pope has, in virtue of his position and office as Bishop of Rome, and as the supreme head of the Catholic Church, an **exceptional** and **extraordinary** means of giving definitive guidance to the Church.

### THE QUESTION OF THE BAD POPES

Throughout its one hundred years-plus history, the Watchtower has used every means possible to discredit the papacy, and it has not hesitated to draw from the checkered history of some of the popes to further this end.

The Rutherford, and immediate post-Rutherford era, were especially notable for the type of literature that also marked many of the more radical Protestant publications. There seemed to be a belief that if it could be shown that the lives of certain popes failed to exhibit the holiness of their office, then the papal foundations would start to crumble.

To this end, researchers have gone back into history to find evidence that the successors of Peter have sometimes lived scandalous lives, and were a disgrace to their office.

Typical of this sort of literature is a small Protestant booklet which appeared some sixty years ago, titled, **THE HORRIBLE LIVES OF THE POPES OF ROME**, by the Scottish speaker, Alexander Ratcliffe, who lectured for some twenty-five years on the Protestant platform.

The first part of the booklet deals with the question of whether Peter was ever in Rome. The author then briefly mentions the matter of rival claimants to the papacy; and finally, he goes back to the Middle Ages to highlight some of the excesses of popes, such as Sergius III (904 A.D.); John X (915 A.D.); John XI (956 A.D.); Boniface VII (974 A.D.); and John XIV (984 A.D.).

The dates given are the years in which the particular person became pope. In some cases, they are actually a year or two out in this booklet. There is one more name from this illfamed list which the author reserves to the last, and that is Rodrigo Borgia, the Spanish nobleman, who became pope in 1452, and took the name Alexander VI.

All the popes I have mentioned, including Boniface VII, who, incidentally, was an anti-pope - one of the rival claimants to the papal throne, which the author speaks of in his booklet, have figured prominently in Watchtower publications of the past, but none more so than Alexander VI. His is the first name that springs to mind whenever a list of bad popes is compiled. The Witnesses have chronicled his reign in detail and doubtless will continue to do so again.

In the small booklet I referred to a few moments ago, Alexander VI is spoken of as the "monster of iniquity." The author writes, "Of all the horrible lives of the popes of Rome, we think that that of the pope, known as Alexander VI, was the most horrible. This man, more beast than man, became pope in 1492." (p.14)

This statement would just about sum up the feeling of most of the objectors to the papacy, so we will use Alexander VI

as an example and look at some of the implications of his reign.

Alexander VI became pope the same year that Columbus discovered America. That he is still remembered today, nearly five hundred years later, is evidence of the notoriety he achieved in his eleven years as pope. Thoroughly worldly by nature, he sought power and prestige for himself and three of the four children he had by his mistress, Vannozza. He secured his election to the papacy by bribery and by casting his own vote, and spent most of his energies, and papal treasures, seeking to further the ambitions of himself and his children.

The murder of his favorite son, Juan, perhaps at the hand of another son, Caesar, almost brought about a repentance of heart, but the change was short-lived, and Alexander soon returned to his licentious living.

His dreams of wealth and power caused waves of unrest in France, Italy and Spain. Moves were made to depose him, but he survived by constantly switching allegiance, and playing one faction against the other.

Alexander's reign came to an end in 1503. He and his son, Caesar, both took ill, and though the younger man recovered, Alexander did not. There is more than a hint of suspicion that his death, which is usually attributed to malaria, was really due to poisoning. But, whatever the cause, Alexander passed on into history and legend.

To the question, "Was Alexander VI a bad pope?" everyone would answer, "Most assuredly." Nor would one find many Catholics ready to defend him.

But it should also be noted that a dissolute pope, such as Alexander VI, was not necessarily a bad administrator. His

personal wickedness did not prevent him from giving astute decisions. Even a pope such as Alexander VI was capable of fulfilling other aspects of his office well. The **OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH** has this to say of Alexander VI:

Among the most notable acts of his pontificate were the series dividing the New World between Spain and Portugal; his prosecution and execution of Savonarola in 1498; the Jubilee which he organized in 1500, and the Crusade against the Moors. A man of immoral life, he was an astute politician, and generous patron of artists. Under him the Leonine city was largely replanned and the castle of Sant' Angelo rebuilt. (2nd Edition, p. 34)

The type of anti-papal literature in circulation today would have us believe that he may well have been the most evil man the world has ever seen. Although he falls far short of this dubious distinction, his position and office magnify the gravity of his behavior. He was called to an extraordinary life of holiness when he became pope, but failed to even begin to live in accordance with sound spiritual principles.

The qualifications for a bishop are set out in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, chapter 3, and the office carries serious responsibilities, such as, an irreproachable life; moderation in habits and temperament; and well-grounded in the truth, with a reputation for sound Christian living. All these qualifications and virtues were well-known to Alexander, but were either ignored or conveniently cast aside in the pursuit

of power and pleasure.

So if Alexander VI's conduct was already lower than a base secular prince of the time, then it was a positive calamity for the Catholic Church.

Alexander VI's whole way of life, especially in his dealings with his son Caesar and daughter Lucretia, was so outrageous, and far-reaching, that when the Reformers sought to discredit the papacy they had a ready-made profligate on which to build their legends.

While I make no attempt to white-wash the papacy, it is now necessary to put the whole question of the bad popes into perspective.

From the time of Peter, the first pope, to his present-day successor, John Paul II, there have been 265 popes. Some six or seven of them - a mere handful, have proved themselves unworthy of their office. Their behavior brought scandal into the Church, but the condemnation for such conduct falls on them personally.

Reading through the anti-papal literature I mentioned earlier, the writers seek to suggest that the Church should be rejected because of the less-than-holy lives of a few individual popes. But this is not a logical reaction. A half a dozen unworthy popes out of 265 is a ratio of about one in every forty or so. The apostles themselves would have been deeply saddened by the defection of Judas, but the office of apostle was not condemned for what he had done. Jesus had spent the whole night in prayer before carefully choosing twelve of them; (Lk 6:12) and yet one of them still rejected him. This was a ratio of one in twelve.

Just as we do not condemn Peter, James, and John, and the other apostles for the action of Judas, neither should we condemn the Catholic Church for the action of some of its popes.

The individual popes who failed to live up to the high calling of their office are not an argument against the Church itself. It is not a question of one rotten apple spoiling the whole barrel. A few individual popes failed to practice what they preached, but they never suggested that everyone else in the Church was free to imitate their behavior. On the contrary. Their behavior would have merited the same stern condemnation as that which Jesus issued on the Scribes and Pharisees. (Lk 23:1ff) The Pharisees sat in the chair of Moses - that is, they were the spiritual leaders of the people; but their deeds did not conform to their teaching. The people were urged to follow their **teaching**, but not to emulate their **example**.

Now the bad popes may have ignored the clear teaching of the Catholic Church on faith and morals, but that was their **personal** choice they must answer for. Their action was in direct violation and a betrayal of the laws of the Church, which strictly forbade such conduct. But another betrayal - that of Judas, shows that his action remained personal. Jesus' words were, "Woe to that **man** by whom the Son of Man is betrayed." (Mk 14:21) - Not woe to all the other apostles.

The actions of **any** sinner is a cause of sadness to the Church, for **each** individual member is needed to make up the fullness of the Body of Christ. The sinful actions of a particular pope is even more distressing, for his office is regarded as sacrosanct, and any sinfulness on his part reflects on the Church as a whole. But one is not justified in continuing

to highlight the activities of a handful of dishonored popes while ignoring the majority of good popes.

For the first five hundred years of its history, the Catholic Church was presided over by saintly popes. All but two of them are enrolled as saints in the Church's martyrology, or list, of martyrs and other saints commemorated in the liturgy. And, throughout its long history, pope after pope has risen to the occasion and guided the Church through periods of turmoil and strife.

Catholics believe this is in fulfillment of Christ's words to be with his Church always, and that the gates of hell will never overcome it. There have been many times when a particular pope failed to be open to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but the office still stands, and the papacy continues to guide the Church throughout the world.

#### THE AUTHORITY OF THE POPE

The final issue to be discussed in this particular talk embodies elements from the previous sections dealing with the primacy of Peter, the controversy surrounding the description of Peter as the Rock, and that of Infallibility. It concerns the whole question of the pope's authority, and how it is exercised in the Church.

I have shown how the very idea of such power residing in a single person is highly objectionable to Protestants and

Jehovah's Witnesses alike, and confirms their distrust of all things Catholic. Any suggestion of authority merely highlights what they have long suspected in regard to the pope; and the ever-present fear of subjugation is the result of hundreds of years of distortion and misrepresentation.

The office of the pope does convey a sense of authority, but it is not the autocratic or dictatorial type of authority that is so often depicted in Protestant publications. What I am referring to here is the ordinary form of government of the Church by the successors of Christ and his apostles.

What we need to do is to put aside these caricatures of the past and try and see the papacy as it really should be seen - an office established by Jesus himself to watch over and care for his flock.

I have already shown the way in which Jesus chose Peter and set him apart as the first of the apostles, so there is no need to cover this ground again. What I want to do now is to look at the way in which this leadership has manifested itself in the early Church, and how it was accepted by all the faithful. To do this I will show three of the crises that arose in the Church's formative years, and how these disputes were finally settled with the intervention of the papacy.

The three examples I have chosen to convey the pre-eminence of the office of pope all occurred in the first five centuries.

The first issue concerned the question of Easter and when it should be celebrated. The second question was the controversy surrounding the re-baptizing of former heretics. And the third issue was that of the "Robber Council" of 449 A.D.

Each of these examples goes to show how the papacy

functioned, and how it was seen to exercise the authority conferred on Peter and his successors. One of the main points I wish to emphasize here is that there was never any objections in the early Church to the pope's authority, and appeals to the pope and his intervention in affairs outside of his immediate jurisdiction were accepted as a matter of course. I make this point again and again in this section, for it is very easy at this period in time to be unaware of the way in which the pope was expected to step in and settle disputes that could not be settled by the bishop of the particular province.

#### 1. THE EASTER QUESTION

Very early in the Church's history, the question was raised as to the correct date for the commemoration of the Lord's Resurrection. There were some who sought to follow the Jewish practice in always observing it on the 14th day of the month Nisan, the day of the Passover, no matter what day of the week it fell on. However, the majority of Christians observed the feast on the following Sunday.

Sometime about the middle of the Second Century, Polycarp, the aged Bishop of Smyrna, journeyed to Rome, and during the course of his visit he sought to persuade Pope Anicetus to adopt the Asia Minor custom of observing Easter on the 14th Nisan date. The pope was able to point to the long-held custom of his predecessors who had always commemorated the Pascal feast on the following Sunday, and he told Polycarp that although this practice would continue to be observed in Rome, he had

no objection to the bishop following a different custom in his own country. The two parted company the best of friends.

About 35 years later, another Pope, Victor I, was confronted with the Pascal Controversy when he sought to bring uniformity throughout the Christian world. Synods were held at Rome and a number of other places to get the majority opinion, and the Sunday following the 14th Nisan was accepted as the preferred date.

Not everyone was in agreement, and Polycrates, the Bishop of Ephesus, voiced his opposition to the uniform dating of Easter. He openly defied the pope and refused him obedience on the question. As a result, Victor withdrew from communion with him, and finally excommunicated him.

The pope's action led the great Irenaeus to plead on behalf of Polycrates, and in a letter to Victor, the Bishop of Lyons reminded the pope of how Polycarp and Anicetus had agreed to permit the Christians of Asia Minor to continue to observe their long-held custom. Part of this letter is preserved in Eusebius's **ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY:**

And when the blessed Polycarp was visiting in Rome in the time of Anicetus, although they disagreed somewhat about certain other things, they immediately made peace with each other, not caring to quarrel in this matter. For neither was Anicetus able to persuade Polycarp not to observe what he had always observed with John, the disciple of the Lord, and the rest of the Apostles; nor was Polycarp able to persuade Anicetus to follow his observance, when Anicetus said that he felt obliged to

follow the customs of the presbyters who had preceded him. In this state of affairs they remained in communion with each other, and Anicetus made way for Polycarp to celebrate the Eucharist in his church, by way of doing him honor. They parted from each other in peace, and kept peace in the Church both for those who observed and for those who did not observe. (ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, 5, 24, 11-18)

Irenaeus is not disputing Victor's authority; nor is he denying the pope's right to excommunicate the Asian churches which refused to accept a uniform date for the great feast of Easter. Eusebius notes in his extract from the letter that Irenaeus gave Victor a great deal of excellent advice: "In particular, that he **should not cut off entire churches of God** because they observed the unbroken tradition of their predecessors."

Adolph Harnack, the German Church historian and theologian, who died in 1930, after carefully examining the evidence, wrote: "How could Victor threaten such an edict of excommunication unless it was commonly admitted that it belonged to the Roman Church to define the conditions of unity in those things that pertained to the faith?"

## 2. THE QUESTION OF RE-BAPTISM.

The second example I have chosen concerns the somewhat

more important question of re-baptizing former heretics. One of the many controversies that arose in the early Church was that of administering baptism to those who had come out of heresy. The question was: If a person had been a heretic, and had been baptized as a member of that sect, should they be re-baptized when they embraced true Christianity?

The matter was not as clear-cut as it is for us today. The early Christians were struggling with a whole host of theological issues that were largely the result of a growing awareness of its living presence in the world. The Scriptures certainly provided the constitutional basis, as it were, for all its beliefs, but each new problem in its daily living led the Church back to this constitution to see how these questions should be answered. And they were not always answered to everyone's satisfaction.

Even among the most honored and influential men of the day, there failed to be unanimous agreement.

The African Church of the early Christian centuries was both widespread and organized; and one of the great saints of the time was the African-born Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian. He was converted from paganism to Christianity about the year 246 A.D., and within three years he was made Bishop of Carthage.

In the year 250 A.D., the Bishop of Rome, Pope Fabian, was among the first to suffer martyrdom when a fierce persecution broke out under the direction of the Roman Emperor, Decius. While thousands of Christians endured all forms of torture and death rather than renounce their faith, large numbers gave way under the threat of punishment and the severity of the oppression, and reverted to their former pagan ways.

This particular persecution was short-lived, and ended with the death of Decius when he was killed in a battle with the invading Goths in 251 A.D. But the ending of hostilities brought other complications in its train, and chief among these was what should be done about those who had previously apostasized and now wished to be reconciled with the Church?

Some bishops were welcoming the apostates back into communion on ridiculously easy conditions, while others took a more rigorist view and utterly opposed their reconciliation on any terms. From the correspondence that has come down to us today, we can see a little of the controversy that this division caused.

Cyprian found himself right in the middle of the controversy. Some of his own people thought he was too severe on the former apostates, while others believed he was too lenient. One of the leaders of this latter faction, a priest named Novatus, broke with Cyprian and joined a schismatic group, led by the Roman presbyter, Novatian, who gave his name to the heresy that followed. This group absolutely refused to be party to any reconciliation of the apostates, even deathbed repentance.

What started out as a local issue suddenly involved the whole Church when dissentents sought the papal ruling on the dispute.

Stephen I had become pope in 254 A.D., and his clash with Cyprian over the baptism and reconciliation issue shows just how fine the line can be between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Cyprian had written one of his most famous works, **ON THE LAPSED**, in 251 A.D., and had drawn on Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians as part of his argument. The Corinthian text

states, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and also the cup of demons." (1 Cor. 10:21) In Cyprian's view, heretics - those who "drink from the cup of demons," confer an invalid baptism which is null and void, and those who are baptized in such circumstances, must be re-baptized when they embrace true Christianity. Cyprian claimed that this was the immemorial custom in the African Church, and two synods held in 255 A.D. and 256 A.D. reaffirmed his position.

When the matter was appealed to Rome, Pope Stephen ruled against Cyprian and stated that baptism administered by heretics is still valid. Part of the letter is preserved in a quote from a letter Cyprian himself sent to another bishop:

Thus if anyone shall come to you from any heresy, then nothing should be undertaken, but that which is traditional, namely, that the hands be imposed unto repentance.

The reply failed to convince Cyprian, and he remained obdurate and unyielding in the face of Stephen's charge that re-baptism was an innovation which violated the traditional teaching of the Church.

The dispute between the two men had reached flash-point, and charges and counter charges had almost caused an open breach between the African Church and Rome. The dispute was suddenly disrupted when an edict of the Emperor Valerian renewed the religious persecutions and Stephen was among the first casualties. He was martyred in 257 A.D., and Cyprian was beheaded the following year.

The deaths of Stephen and Cyprian put an end to the dispute, and although the breach between Carthage and Rome was never officially healed, the bitterness gradually faded and the African Church eventually adopted the practice of the universal Church.

In the light of subsequent events, it is evident that Cyprian was incorrect in maintaining that re-baptism was necessary before heretics could be re-admitted into communion with the Church. But, then, the pope also failed to emerge unscathed. Firmilian, the Bishop of Caesarea, in Cappadocia, who sided with Cyprian against Pope Stephen, described the pope as, "glorying in the place of the bishopric, and contending that he holds the succession of Peter, on whom the foundations of the Church have been laid." (Firmilian, Letter to Cyprian, 75, 17)

The pope may have been correct in his stand against re-baptism, but his approach could have been more conciliatory, and this may have prevented the bitterness that followed.

The 17th Century Anglican bishop and writer, Jeremy Taylor, put it this way:

Cyprian's behavior in the dispute has generally been contrasted favorably with Stephen's conduct. Cyprian did right in a wrong cause (as it has since been judged), and Stephen did ill in a good cause. As far then as charity is to be preferred before a true opinion, so far is Cyprian's practice a better precedent for us, and an example of primitive sanctity, than the zeal and indiscretion of Stephen. (THE LIBERTY OF PROPHECYING,

pp. 2, 23)

### 3. COUNCILS AND PAPAL AUTHORITY

The final example I have chosen covers a complex and critical episode in the Church's history. It was spread over a twenty year period from the closing of the Third General Council of the Church at Ephesus in 431 A.D., to the Fourth General Council held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

The intervening years saw a new heresy come to the fore, new personalities take the center stage, and a new council called to settle the ensuing dispute.

Following the closing of the Ephesian council and the condemnation of the Nestorian heresy in September of 431 A.D., the leading figures of that council, namely Cyril of Alexandria, and John of Antioch, who had previously been bitterly opposed to each other's understanding of the person and natures in Christ, were finally reconciled, and came to realize that they were both professing the same truths in different terms.

The main problem stemmed from the use of the Greek word **physis**, as in "There is only one **physis** (or **person**) in Christ." In Antiochean thought, however, the word referred to the **natures** in Christ. So when the Antiocheans spoke of two **physis** (i.e., two **natures**) in Christ, Cyril's supporters took it to mean they were saying that there were two **persons** in Christ.

Each faction accused the other of heresy, and it took

nearly eighteen months of negotiations to bring about agreement between the two parties. The Accord, or Formula of Reunion, between Cyril and John of Antioch, was accepted in April 433 A.D., almost two years after the closure of the Ephesian council, and each recognized the truly apostolic spirit of the other.

But, as with the old saying, where one door shuts, another door opens, this was certainly the case in this instance.

The dust had scarcely begun to settle when another new and dangerous heresy began to surface in the East. And, as I said a moment ago, new personalities began to take center stage.

John of Antioch had died in 440 A.D., and Cyril, four years later. Just a few short years after Cyril's death, the superior of a large monastery at Constantinople began to teach yet another variation on the natures in Christ. Eutyches, the monk in question, was already getting on in years, having been born sometime around 378 A.D. He had previously taken a firm stand against the Nestorian heresy, which held that there was no true union of natures in Christ, and that corresponding to these two natures, there were also two subjects or persons in Christ.

Eutyches became so paranoid about this heresy that he began to see Nestorianism everywhere, even when it did not exist!

As is so often the case, when a person contemplates a doctrinal aberration so exclusively, other aspects that are necessary to maintain one's perspective become clouded and confused, and are in danger of leading one into an opposite error to which they are fighting.

Eutyches was not unknown in Constantinople. He had over

three hundred monks in his monastery, and his friendship with the eunuch, Chrysaphius, gave him great influence at court. However, when he began to confound the two natures in Christ, and taught that there were indeed two natures "**before** the Incarnation," but, "only one **after** the Incarnation," it became clear that the monk had strayed into a new heresy, and was saying that the union of the divine and human natures in Christ had taken place in some pre-existent state. The coalescence of the two natures meant that the human nature had become so absorbed in the divine nature as to have no identity of its own, and that, as a result, there was **now** only one person and one nature in Christ. The heresy became known as the Monophysite heresy (from **mono:** meaning "one," and **physis:** meaning "nature").

When Eutyches went so far as to accuse Eusebius, the Bishop of Dorylaeum with holding this heresy, he had to expect that there would be serious repercussions and opposition to his charges.

At a synod held at Constantinople in 448 A.D., and presided over by the Bishop Flavian, Eutyches was found to be in error, and following his refusal to renounce his heresy, he was excommunicated. He forfeited his post at the monastery and was stripped of his priestly functions. Bishop Flavian then wrote a full account of the synod's actions to Pope Leo, setting out the reasons for Eutyches' sentence.

After carefully studying the detailed report, Leo confirmed the sentence passed on the former monk.

The matter did not rest there, for the Emperor Theodosius II, then summoned a council to meet at Ephesus on August 1, 449, to deal with the conflict which followed the condemnation

of Eutyches.

Pope Leo was unable to attend the council, and was represented by three legates, under the leadership of Hilary. They carried with them Leo's famous statement of faith, the Dogmatic Epistle - also known as the Tome of Leo, to Bishop Flavian, with instructions that it was to be read at the council.

But things did not go according to plan. The council was presided over by Dioscurus, the Bishop of Alexandria, who was himself a staunch defender of Eutyches. With the support of other like-minded bishops and the help of outside forces, Dioscurus refused to recognize the authority of the Papal legates and twice prevented them from reading Leo's Tome to the council.

Not only was Dioscurus successful in reversing the excommunication of Eutyches, but he was also instrumental in the condemnation of his accuser, Eusebius, the Bishop of Dorylaeum; and the imprisoning of the Patriarch, Flavian, who was so ill-treated by the rabble that he died three days later from his injuries.

But despite his injuries, the Patriarch rallied sufficiently to write an appeal to Leo, and to record some of the atrocious behavior that took place at the council. His own words which have come down to us reveals the arrogance of Dioscurus, and the barbarous manner in which the council was conducted:

The bishops had arrived at Ephesus, in accordance with the Imperial summons, and met Leo's legates. There was general agreement among the bishops, except for the Alexandrian contingent, whose previous contempt for the

writer had been very marked.

Dioscurus suddenly called the council together; he refused any general consideration of the decisions of Nicaea or of Ephesus (the General Council of 431 A.D.), but, giving orders that I and the bishops who sat in judgment with me, and my clergy also, should not be allowed any hearing or the utterance of a word of defense on any point, threatening also some with deposition, some with imprisonment, and others with various punishments, he cleared the way for the immediate reading in our presence of an account of the matter previously prepared by Eutyches.

After this, he directed the aforesaid Eutyches to put in a written charge against me, and when this was read, treating me as unworthy of any argument or question, he rose at once to his feet, declared him (Eutyches) Catholic in his belief, reinstating him in the priesthood, and also compelled some bishops against their will to make the same declaration.

Flavian then went on to detail the outrageous conduct at the council, how right order had been overthrown, and how heresy had replaced orthodoxy.

In the midst of all the confusion, the Papal legates were able to escape, and they also reported the whole affair to Leo.

The Pope's reaction was as swift as it was severe.

Leo immediately revoked all the council's decisions. He condemned all those who had taken part in the deliberations; and in a later letter he described the Ephesian assembly as

"not a council at all, but a **latrocinium**" - (i.e., a gathering of bandits), or, as it came to be known in history, the Robber Council.

The Pope called for a new council to be convened so as to right the wrongs done at Ephesus. But with the same principals again manipulating the events, it is quite possible that the outcome would not have been any different the second time around. However, the death of Emperor Theodosius on July 28, 450 A.D., following a fall from his horse, and the accession of his brother-in-law, Marcian, were just two of the circumstances that changed the course of history.

The new Emperor sent out the summonses for a council to be held at Nicaea on September 1, 451 A.D., and again Leo was invited to attend. This time, however, Leo was more concerned with a new scourge that was threatening the peace around him - that of Attila the Hun, who was gathering his hordes to attack the Imperial City.

In his place, two legates, the bishops Paschasinus and Boniface were to represent the papacy; the only two Western bishops to attend the council.

At the last minute the Emperor decided that because of the political situation, Nicaea was too far from the center of things and changed the council venue to Chalcedon, just opposite the capital.

The delay gave Dioscurus one last chance to win back his dwindling supporters, and in a final act of defiance he arranged the excommunication of the pope. But it was all to no avail. The Fourth General Council opened at Chalcedon on October 8, 451 A.D., with the pope's senior legate, the bishop Paschasinus

presiding over the assembly.

It was the largest council to date, with more than five hundred bishops gathering in the great church of St. Euphemia for the opening session. Leo's instructions to the legates were direct and to the point. Under no circumstances was Dioscurus to be permitted to have an active role in the council. If he did, the legates were to leave. The council was to formally annul every resolution and decree of the **Latrocinium**, and Eutyches was to be officially condemned for his heresy.

The council then drew up its own statement of faith in what came to be called the Chalcedon Definition, in which the definitions of the three earlier General Councils of Nicaea (325 A.D.), Constantinople (381 A.D.), and Ephesus (431 A.D.), were reaffirmed. The council Fathers stated that the recent heresies of Nestorius and Eutyches now needed to be answered in the same way, and to this end the definition formally repudiated the Nestorian heresy and the Monophysite heresy of Eutyches.

Apart from an attempt to elevate the see of Constantinople to that of Rome, the work of the council was finished. Yet another heresy had sought to lead astray the people of God, but as always, the Holy Spirit continued to guide the Church as Jesus had promised (Jn 14:26; Mt 28:20).

### WHAT IS MEANT BY AUTHORITY?

Instead of merely citing a list of early Christian quotations to show the apostolic authority of the pope, I have presented these three examples of important episodes in the Church's early history to bring home the **manner** in which the pope has intervened in the Church's affairs.

What I have tried to do is to show the naturalness of the pope's intervention. Each patriarch or bishop governed their own province or see, and made all the important decisions on matters of faith. But when disputes arose and there was no longer any possibility of resolving the issue, the bishops turned to Rome - which was regarded as the normal course of action in such cases - for a definitive judgment on the matter.

This was not something totally unexpected; this was not something restricted to a local community. This was accepted as a matter of course; and it was world wide.

The Eastern churches, and even the far-flung Western churches of Africa and other countries, governed their domains in accordance with their own laws, and would brook no outside interference from neighboring communities. But when a dispute arose which threatened the peace and stability of their Christian community, they did not hesitate to appeal to Rome as the final authority to have the matter settled.

The three examples I've referred to of early papal influence were not chosen at random. Although other instances could have been used to illustrate the papal authority in the early Church, I selected these three because of the **manner** in

which the popes expressed this authority, and the way in which it was accepted as a matter of course by Christians everywhere.

Christians today speak of the "early Church," and "early disputes," and "early heresies," and "early councils," but there is seldom any mention of early popes, and the important role they played in governing the Church and settling these disputes and heresies. And, in omitting any such references, they are giving only half the picture. The Church did not operate in a vacuum. It was conscious of its links with the apostles, and there was the ever-present awareness that **one** of the apostles had been singled out in a special way to give leadership to the Church.

This leadership did not end with the death of this apostle, but continued on in the person of his successors. The apostle, of course, was Peter, and his successors were the bishops of Rome - the popes; and in the sometimes turbulent history of the early Church, with all its double-dealing and intrigues, the pope was always there as the center-point or pivot to which the other churches looked for final guidance.

In the Eastern Church, for example, the Greek-speaking Christians of the great sees of Antioch and Alexandria were not only separated geographically, but even their understanding of the Christian faith, their theology, was tempered by certain schools of thought that were unique to their own areas. Both sees had their champions of the faith. Alexandria had Clement and Origen in the Second and Third Centuries, and Athanasius and Cyril in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries; while Antioch could boast such names as Ignatius, Lucian and Chrysostom.

But with the clash of personalities and the divergent

views that sprang up over the years, each looked on the other with a certain suspicion that they were not completely orthodox. Some of this wariness translated into open hostility, and it fell to the popes of the day to step in and give a definitive judgment on a particular issue or dispute.

In all this, the popes' decisions were accepted as final, and though the result may not always have been to everyone's liking, it was recognized that there was simply no other avenue of appeal. Even the decisions and definitions of the General Councils had to be approved and ratified by the popes before they could be officially promulgated.

Having given examples of the popes' authority in action in the early Church, it is now the appropriate time to further highlight this authority with quotes from some of the contemporary sources from the same period.

In an earlier section dealing with the question of succession, I quoted a passage from Irenaeus which dealt with the listing of bishops and how the papal list contained the names of the popes from Peter down to the time of Irenaeus himself.

It is necessary to quote this passage again, but this time I will quote it in full, for the last part of the passage refers to the authority of the Roman Church. By way of variation I am using the translation of William Jurgens, from Volume I of THE FAITH OF THE EARLY FATHERS:

But since it would be too long to enumerate in such a volume as this the succession of all the

Churches, we shall confound all those who, in whatever manner, whether through self-satisfaction or vainglory, or through blindness and wicked opinion, assemble other than where it is proper, by pointing out here the successions of the bishops of the greatest and most ancient Church known to all, founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul, that Church which has the tradition and the faith which comes down to us after having been announced to men by the Apostles. For this Church, **because of its superior origin, all churches must agree**, that is, all the faithful in the whole world, and it is in her that the faithful everywhere have maintained the Apostolic tradition. **AGAINST HERESIES, 3:3, 2)**

I have already mentioned the Easter controversy which took place in the middle to late Second Century, and how Polycarp had discussed the question with Pope Anicetus. About thirty years later Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus again raised the question with Pope Victor, and when the decision was not to his satisfaction, he disputed with the pope to the point where he was excommunicated. It then became necessary for Irenaeus to step in and intercede on the bishop's behalf.

The re-baptism of heretics, which I also discussed, is yet another example of how the authority of the pope was accepted in the early Church.

The African bishop, Cyprian, had written to the people that "there is one God and one Christ, and one Church, and

one Chair founded on Peter by the Word of the Lord. It is not possible to set up another altar or for there to be another priesthood beside that one altar and one priesthood. Whoever has gathered elsewhere is scattering." (Letter of Cyprian **TO ALL HIS PEOPLE**, 43 (40), 5)

The following year, Cyprian wrote a letter to Pope Cornelius in which he expressed his views on certain heretics:

With a false bishop appointed for themselves by heretics, they dare even to set sail and carry letters from schismatics and blasphemers to the Chair of Peter and to the principal Church, in which the priestly unity has its source. Nor did they take thought that these are Romans, whose faith was praised by the preaching Apostle, and among whom it is not possible for perfidy to have entrance. (Letter of Cyprian **TO CORNELIUS**, 59, 14)

Apart from these typical quotations in relation to papal authority, it is also helpful to look at another group of quotations that belong to the early centuries of the Church. These belong to the period of the early General Councils I've been discussing, and are an invaluable mine of information on the role of the pope.

Pope Celestine, for example, wrote to the Fathers of the Ephesian Council held in 431 A.D., and as Professor Kelly, in his **OXFORD DICTIONARY OF POPES**, points out, he "repeatedly asserted, with an unprecedented insistence, the pope's claim, as successor and living representative of St Peter, to paternal

oversight of the entire Church, Eastern no less than Western."  
(P. 42)

The previous year (August 11, 430 A.D.) the same pope had written to the Christians at Constantinople: "The authority of our see has decided . . ." - using the noun "authentia," meaning **supreme** authority.

This authority became more evident when Celestine wrote to Cyril on the condemnation of Nestorius. Cyril was to act in place of the pope, and in Celestine's own words, Cyril was to ". . . **appropriate** to yourself the authority of our see, and using our position, you shall, with resolute severity carry out this sentence [referring to] of excommunication against Nestorius."

Cyril was to speak with all the authority of the Roman see. With no thought that his words would not be accepted outside his own see, the pope also sent copies of his letter to the bishops of the neighboring sees, to John of Antioch; Rufus of Thessalonica; Juvenal of Jerusalem; and Flavian of Philippi. A letter was also sent to Nestorius himself, and in these letters he states with authority: "The sentence we pronounce, which is even more the sentence of our master Christ who is God, is . . . ", and goes on to say that if Nestorius does not recant, he is to be excommunicated.

In the letter to the Council Fathers at Ephesus, Pope Celestine urged them to be unanimous in their decisions, and not to be afraid to act. The Fathers were to listen to his legates who would tell the assembled bishops ". . . the things which we decided at Rome were to be done."

The three legates who represented Pope Celestine at

Ephesus were also given written instructions to make sure that the authority of the Apostolic See was duly respected. The instructions state:

We enjoin upon you the necessary task of guarding the authority of the Apostolic See. And if the instructions handed you have to mention this, and if you have to be present in the assembly, if it comes to controversy, it is not yours to join the fight, but to judge of their opinions. (**LETTER TO THE LEGATES TO THE COUNCIL OF EPHESUS**, May 8, 431)

I've mentioned the Ephesian Council in the previous section, and will do so again when I speak on the Virgin Mary in a later talk on **THREE DOCTRINES**. I do so again now because it is easy to speak of the councils and General Councils of the Church and yet be ignorant of what they accomplished, and how important they were in the life of the Church.

I've also mentioned the attitude of Protestant scholars, such as Loraine Boettner, to the Church and councils in general. In his book **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, Dr. Boettner stated quite frankly:

The history of the church at large shows all too clearly that church leaders and church councils can and do make mistakes, some of them seriously. Consequently their decisions should have no authority except as they are based on Scripture. (P. 76)

In other words, the work of the early Councils is of no real importance or significance in the lives of many of today's Christians. Nor do they even want to be associated or identified with the early Christians and the early Councils. As I've said before, they see the Apostolic Church and have no trouble identifying themselves with Jesus and his apostles, then there is this huge gap of fifteen, sixteen, or even eighteen centuries which they don't want to know about, and which is a closed book to them. They may know or have heard that the Council of Nicaea defined the divinity of Jesus Christ; that the Council of Chalcedon pronounced on the divine and human natures of Christ, but the inner history of the Councils; the acts or minutes of the Councils, and the canons or disciplinary laws and pronouncements are completely foreign to them. And the sad thing is - they have absolutely no interest in seeking to remedy the situation.

Apart from the first General Council held at Nicaea in 325 A.D., we have acts or minutes of the Councils that have been carefully preserved and handed down to us from these earliest times.

The Councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon record a number of important statements that refer to the authority of the pope and the way in which it went without saying that the Bishop of Rome had the **right** to intervene in matters outside his own domain.

The Ephesian Council of 431, for instance, did not proceed without incident. There was a clash of personalities between Cyril and Bishop John of Antioch that lasted almost to the time of their deaths. The council had opened two days

prior to John's arrival on June 24, 431, and on learning that Cyril had not waited for him, John immediately convened a council of his own with thirty-three supporters, and forced the condemnation and deposition of Cyril, and even went ahead with moves to excommunicate the other bishops who had attended the opening session without him.

It was only the late arrival of the papal legates which defused what was an explosive situation. Following the instructions of Pope Celestine, the two bishops Arcadius and Projectus, and the third legate, the priest Philip, promptly sided with Cyril who again presided over the assembly. This time the official account records that he does so ". . . taking the place of Celestine, the most holy and most reverend **chief-bishop** of the Church of the Romans."

The work of the Council then went about its business, and, in one of the more impassioned moments, the assembly voiced its support for the pope and Cyril by proclaiming: "Cyril is the new Paul. Celestine is the guardian of the faith. Celestine agrees with the Council. There is one Celestine, one Cyril, one faith of the Council, one faith of the world-wide Church."

The work of the opening session, which they had not attended, was officially accepted by the papal legates, and after confirming the sentence passed on Nestorius, one of the legates, the priest Philip, made the following speech to the Council Fathers:

No one doubts, nay, it is a thing known for centuries, that the holy and most blessed Peter, the prince and head of the Apostles, the pillar of

the faith and the foundation on which the Catholic Church is built, received from our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Savior and Redeemer of the human race, the keys of the kingdom, and that to him there was given the power of binding and of loosing from sin; who, down to this day, and for evermore, lives and exercises judgment in his successors.

These quotations and other similar remarks highlight the fallacy of statements made by the opponents to the papacy, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants such as Loraine Boettner, that the early Church "knew nothing" about the office of pope:

They neither claimed the title nor exercised the power. But as time went on, particularly after the fall of the Roman Empire, more and more power, political, as well as ecclesiastical, fell into the hands of the bishop of Rome, and so the papacy developed. (**ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 241)

This sort of statement would find ready acceptance among Jehovah's Witnesses, but it is not in accord with the facts.

I have attempted to show that the authority of the pope was universally accepted from Christianity's earliest beginnings. I have given quote after quote from all the great Fathers of the Church to point out their acknowledgment of papal authority, and the complete lack of any objections to this

authority.

Watchtower literature, as does Dr. Boettner's and other anti-Catholic books, would have us believe that there is no early evidence for papal authority. But such is not the case. I will mention just one more incident to emphasize the pope's authority, one which I hope will be seen as more than enough to answer the critics' objections.

The Fourth General Council, held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D., settled the question of the dual natures of Jesus Christ. But it was also instrumental in creating a situation that has been a source of contention between the Catholic West and Orthodox East for nearly fifteen and a half centuries.

The Council enacted 28 canons, or disciplinary laws, and it is the last of these, canon 28, that caused all the hostility and rivalry that has existed down to the present day. This canon gave pride of place (after Rome) to the Imperial City of Constantinople, thereby usurping the rightful second place of Alexandria, and that of Antioch, which had previously enjoyed third place. Two other canons, 9 and 17 also make mention of the "Throne of Constantinople."

The contentious canon was passed by the Council Fathers at the session of October 31, 451 A.D. - in the absence of the papal legates. The following day, the pope's senior legate, Bishop Paschasinus, strongly objected, and another legate, Bishop Lucentius, was even more pointed:

The Holy See ought not be basely treated while we look on. And therefore, all that was done yesterday, in our absence, to the prejudice of the

canons and laws, we demand of Your Highness to order it to be annulled. Otherwise, let our appeal in law against the canon be attached to the minutes that we may know what it is we must report to the Apostolic Bishop who is the first personage in the whole Church, so that he may be able to pronounce sentence on the unjust act against his see, and on the overthrowing of the canon law.

After hearing the report on the Chalcedon council from his legates, Pope Leo wrote long letters to the Emperor, the Empress and the Patriarch of Constantinople. He blamed the "obnoxious greediness" of Constantinople in seeking prominence over the apostolic sees of Alexandria and Antioch, and in the end he writes:

We do not recognize, and by the blessed Apostle Peter's authority we absolutely disannul in comprehensive terms, in all ecclesiastical cases obeying those laws which the Holy Spirit set forth by the 318 bishops for the pacific observance of all bishops in such a way that even if a much greater number were to pass a different decree to theirs, whatever was opposed to their regulation must be held in no respect. (Letter 105 of Leo, annulling canon 28 of Chalcedon, May 22, 452 A.D.)

Anatolios, the Patriarch of Constantinople, wrote back to the pope disclaiming any complicity in the passing of

Canon 28, and after protesting his innocence he reminded the pope that the whole matter of the canon remained worthless and ineffectual **without the necessary papal validation.**

Leo took the reply in good faith and the issue appeared to be closed, but the canon continued to plague discussions over the years, and despite the objections of the papacy, it was gradually accepted in the East and eventually led, in part, to the great Eastern Schism of the 11th Century.

Leo's letter to Anatolios does not give any suggestion that he thought it might be rejected in the East. The whole tone of the letter was that Leo fully expected that what he had to say would be heeded by all, and that his position of "chief-bishop" gave him the right not only to intervene in the affairs of other sees, but that "things decided at Rome were to be carried out." (Cf. earlier quote from Leo's Letter to the Fathers of the Council of Ephesus)

All this "behind the scenes" activity and intrigue is completely lost on today's Christians who prefer to ignore the work of the papacy and the General Councils, and because of this there is that enormous Black Hole in their understanding of Christian history spanning the end of the New Testament period and today. Many of them go so far as to highlight some of the less-savory aspects of this history and condemn many of the early fathers for the course of action they followed.

One is reminded of Matthew 23:30, where the Scribes and Pharisees stood self-condemned when they said that "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have joined them in shedding the prophets' blood." While condemning their ancestors for persecuting the keepers of Israel's conscience,

they nevertheless condemn themselves, for they are the sons of "our fathers" (i.e., share their fathers' characteristics). In the same way, these early Christian fathers are our link with the apostolic Church, and however much we may deny it, we owe our Christianity to them and are the spiritual children of these great people of the past and have inherited our faith through them.

Early Christianity and its subsequent history is as much a part of our heritage as that of the apostolic period, and as I have said so many times, we cannot brush aside this history and still claim the name of Christian.

The early fathers were certainly aware of their continuity with the apostolic Church, and right down through history, with all its ups and downs, and its good and bad points, its saints and sinners, this continuity has never ceased to be our link with Jesus and his apostles.

## CONCLUSION

Now I know I have left many questions unanswered. In fact, I have probably raised more questions than I have answered, but that is the nature of this type of subject. As I said at the start, some Jehovah's Witnesses, and many Protestants never give any thought to the papacy. For them it does not even exist. But for others, it is the embodiment of all that is evil and must be resisted at every turn.

The whole question of the papacy is still very much a live issue, and can arouse the fiercest opposition whenever talk of re-approachment with Rome is mentioned. As recently as September 20, 1989, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, was severely censured in the press for suggesting that he would be willing to accept the pope as world church leader if it would bring about a reunion of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.

There were immediate demands for his resignation. Dr. David Samuel, Director of the Church Society, said Dr. Runcie was bartering with the Protestant tradition of the Church of England and should step aside. And, in Ulster, the Protestant leader, the Rev. Ian Paisley, said that the Archbishop's desire to "bow to the knee of the Roman anti-Christ" was "an act of darkest possible treachery."

What I would like you to do is to ask yourself if this reaction is justified.

Is the pope the "monster of iniquity" that is presented to us in Protestant and Watchtower literature? Is he so drunk on power and greed that his only concern is the increase of the wealth of the Vatican? Is he so arrogant that he accepts all manner of titles that tend to elevate him to the level of Deity?

These are just a few of the objections that opponents of the papacy are ready to raise whenever the subject is mentioned.

In this particular talk, I have presented a very broad - and necessarily brief - outline of the papacy. I have covered all the points I promised to discuss at the start of this talk,

and included an additional section on the Authority of the Pope, which was not intended as part of the original text. I have sought to answer all the common objections to the papacy that are still raised today.

Much of what I have had to say has dealt with the negative side of papal opposition, but I have tried to balance the picture by answering the objections in a positive manner.

I have also mentioned that this may well be the first time some of you may have heard a presentation of this type. If the sum total of your knowledge of the papacy has come from hostile sources, then the picture will have been very distorted. All I can hope is that I have been able to clear the air somewhat so that some of the hostility has been removed, and the way opened to see the papacy in a more favorable light.

**JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE

BY

JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

Greetings!

The subject of this talk is the Bible. And, as with the previous talk on the papacy, it is a multi-sided issue that has a lot of threads coming together to form a very complex picture.

It is possible to approach the Bible from so many different ways. The **WATCHTOWER PUBLICATIONS INDEX**, from 1930 through to 1985, not only devotes five pages to the subjects

listed under the general heading of the "Bible," but also refers the reader to other related topics such as the Apocrypha, Bible Authenticity, Bible Canon, Bible Manuscripts, and Bible Translations. And this is what I want to do in this talk.

I have divided it into five sections, and hopefully, I will be able to look at each section in turn.

The five sections - not necessarily in order of importance - but placed in this sequence to give an organized arrangement to the subject matter, deal, in turn, with, First: The question of Authority.

Second: The Catholic attitude to the Bible.

Third: The formation of the Canon.

Fourth: The inclusion of the Apocrypha.

Fifth: The place of Tradition in the Church.

I would remind you that these talks are directed first and foremost at people who are in the Watchtower organization; those who have left the Watchtower, or those who may be **thinking** of leaving the Watchtower, and are genuinely seeking to find answers to questions that have troubled them as Jehovah's Witnesses.

A Jehovah's Witness, or anybody who has studied Watchtower literature would be aware that there are constant fear-filled attacks on the Catholic Church that seem to be out of all proportion to similar coverage given to other Christian denominations.

It could be argued that it is the **size** of the Catholic Church that demands that it be written up in greater detail, but the answer runs much deeper. **Every** Christian denomination claims to have **gone back** to the basic apostolic teaching that derived from Christ himself. They have discovered principles

that have been submerged or pushed aside over the centuries and were only brought to light again in our own day.

The phrase, "gone back," implies a break in continuity. Somewhere along the line the Church had lost sight of these **all-important** principles or teachings - so important, that the absence of them in these latter days renders a particular church unorthodox, and in extreme cases, heretical.

This is the view held by Jehovah's Witnesses in relation to the Catholic Church. According to the Witnesses, the Church founded by Jesus Christ failed to maintain its integrity. Soon after the death of the last of the apostles, it fell into error and down through the centuries as the Catholic Church, it piled fallacy on fallacy until today, there is simply no truth left in it.

According to the Watchtower, Protestantism itself, emerged from this apostate church. It was **protesting** against its parent. It was born out of error, and it sought to find the truth by disowning its parent.

Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand, claim to have started with a clean slate. A little more than one hundred years ago, a deeply religious, God-fearing man, named Charles Taze Russell, who was himself a former Presbyterian, turned Congregationalist, turned Adventist, discovered that all the churches were wrong, and set about founding a new church or religion of his own so that he could give to the masses their "food at the proper time." (Mt 24:45)

What Charles Russell of the Witnesses, and Joseph Smith of the Mormons, and others who have come after them, have done, is to follow in the footsteps of countless others who have sought to reform the Church by **founding** a new one.

They claimed to have discovered new truths that were

lost sight of centuries ago, and which have only now been revealed in these last days.

And **how** have these truths been re-discovered? Through a new insight into the Bible, which has given **them** the ability to read the Scriptures with an understanding that no one else has possessed since the time of the apostles

In reality, the results have been less impressive.

In the case of the Witnesses, we are faced with a pseudo-Christian group whose teachings are an amazing amalgam of ancient heresies that have been all but forgotten with the passage of time. These heresies are remembered today only as historical oddities, and are a fragile monument to their founders' folly, and the gullibility of the people they duped.

And yet the Watchtower has fallen back on these discredited errors of the past and dressed them up in new clothes and re-presented them to a new and unsuspecting audience which knows nothing of history, and even less of sound theology.

And this has been the case with **every** attempt to improve on the Church founded by Jesus Christ. Time after time the Scriptures are dragged out and offered as proof that the Witnesses have divine backing for all their teachings.

But, none of this is new. The great Christian apologist, Tertullian, who was born towards the latter half of the 2nd Century A.D., faced the same arguments that the Witnesses and others are still using today. And his answer to his 2nd Century opponents is still valid today:

They fiddle with the Scriptures, and base their arguments on them. Speaking of faith, they claim that the only basis for discussion is the **written** word of faith. Thus they wear down those whose faith

is strong, they ensnare the weak, and fill all those in between with doubts. We commence by laying down as a principle that people should not be allowed to use Scripture as a basis for arguing about the faith. (DE PRAESCRPTIONE HAERITICORUM, ch. 15)

What Tertullian is saying, is that heretics had no right to use the Scriptures, and this statement brings me to the first section of this talk, that of authority.

#### THE QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

From time to time the Witnesses accuse the Catholic Church of being over-bearing in relation to the Bible, and usually associate such behavior with dictatorial suppression.

The January 1, 1980 edition of the WATCHTOWER, quoted a Roman Catholic cardinal as saying, "We must remember that only the Catholic Church has the right to preach the Gospel. Proselytism in a Catholic state is bad and must be repressed." (WATCHTOWER, p.5)

These are similar sentiments to those expressed in another WATCHTOWER article which appeared in 1960. I will quote the passage in full as it makes a number of points that I will refer to elsewhere in this talk.

The article in question was published in the WATCHTOWER of October 1, 1960, under the heading, "The Holy Bible - the Book by Jehovah's Witnesses."

It goes without contradiction that Jehovah God made the Holy Bible by means of earthly servants

whom he used as his controlled secretaries, scribes or penmen. Hence it strikes one as quite shocking to read what the **TOLEDO** (Ohio) **BLADE** reported in its issue of March 1, 1943. It reported a priest of a religious organization as having said the following in the Immaculate Conception church the preceding day:

'It is not generally realized, as it should be, that the Bible belongs exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. The Catholic Church made the Bible; she has preserved it; and she interprets it. Others may read Holy Scripture - and they are urged to do so - but beyond this they have no right whatsoever in regard to it. Almighty God has placed this precious heritage exclusively in the hands of his Catholic Church. It may seem strange to say that the Catholic Church made the Bible, for we know that this volume is the Word of God, every word of it was authorized ultimately by him. But we must remember the manner in which God did this . . . The Catholic Church not only made the Bible; she also preserved it . . . Almighty God . . . too, set up a supreme court - the Catholic Church, to determine just what his constitution - Holy Scripture, means.'

The writer concluded this report with this remark:

In agreement with that, many pamphlets, and many magazine and newspaper advertisements have appeared with the bold heading: 'The Bible is a Catholic Book.'

The Watchtower's use of the news report, and its own comments, typify its methods of convincing its followers, and others, of the oppressive, autocratic nature of the Catholic Church. The writer had gone back almost to the Rutherford era to obtain the news report, and the resulting **WATCHTOWER** article was still characteristic of the Judge's own style of writing.

And nothing much has changed. A more recent, October 8, 1979, special edition of **AWAKE**, focused attention on "The World's Best Seller," and the Witnesses were again dredging up the past to show how the [Catholic] Church had sought to keep the Bible from the masses.

This selective reporting and interpretation of lectures, events and incidents is always open to dishonesty, but the way in which the presentation is slanted, or the emphasis on certain features, can give the reader or listener a biased impression. And this has always been the case in all news media coverage.

As, is, to be expected, opposition to Catholicism's authoritarian approach to the Bible, is not confined to the Watchtower. Protestants have long held that Catholics have deliberately sought to keep the Bible from the people, and has used all sorts of methods to do so.

Now it is necessary at this point to remind you that we are entering very sensitive areas in dealing with these subjects. As with the question of the papacy, the issues are still very much alive, and in some cases are even festering sores that cause deep pain whenever they are mentioned. But it is not possible to sidestep the issues and pretend they don't exist. What I do ask is that we try to keep in mind that what we are facing today is a legacy of more than four centuries of bigotry and suspicion that has left an indelible mark on

us all.

None of the arguments are new. They have all been aired before, and probably more forcefully. They evoke the fiercest opposition, even to the point of physical violence, so they are not matters that can be discussed dispassionately in certain circles.

However, as I said in the previous talk on the papacy, Jehovah's Witnesses who leave the Watchtower, or, who are thinking of leaving the Watchtower, often exchange one form of error for another. They sense the need for God and genuinely seek to find him. When they finally break free of the Watchtower's influence, they usually gravitate towards one or another of the more prominent Fundamentalist groups, that, in **many** ways, are little different from that which they are escaping.

Now before you rise up in arms in protest, I will try and clarify what I have said. I have seen Fundamentalism at its worst (without the violence), and I have seen Protestantism at its best. And there is no comparison between the two. So I am not saying that they are one and the same. Protestants I know, and whom I have worked with and fellowshiped with live Christ in their lives, and the Holy Spirit is a constant source of inspiration to them.

On the other hand, Fundamentalism is a distant relative to mainline Protestantism, and one that many Protestants would rather disown. Hard-core Fundamentalism is not open to rational argument, and ecumenically-minded Protestants are more often than not, targeted for abuse as traitors to the Reformation.

The Fundamentalist's crudely literal approach to the Bible, and their opposition to the Catholic Church are just two of the areas of basic similarity with the Watchtower. And

it is from these two areas that many of their respective teachings begin to merge.

Now, coming back to the question of authority, we see that it asks the age-old question, "Which came first, the Church or the Bible?" Its the chicken or the egg question. It is deceptively simple, but fraught with ill-feeling and controversy. The real issue is to determine the final seat of authority in religion - the Church **or** the Bible?

This is a question that should never have raised its head; and it has done so, only since the 16th Century Reformers pushed the Church aside in favor of the Bible alone as the final rule of faith and practice.

The ensuing controversy between Protestants and Catholics should have been played out long ago, but the question is still very much alive, and continues to be one of the basic issues affecting relationships between the two.

The first step is to answer the question, and then look at the side issues that are associated with it.

It is a common misconception to think that all Protestants subscribe to the theory that each individual can authoritatively interpret Scripture. The more traditional, or mainline, Protestants are also "church-oriented," and their Bible knowledge comes through the usual channels of learning, such as Bible classes, sermons, Sunday schools, and church authority.

Even the Fundamentalist attitude is governed by "rules" of interpretation and understanding, or no two people would believe the same.

But when "authority" is mentioned in the same breath as the Catholic Church, it immediately assumes a different tone and becomes something of a dirty word.

"Authority" is understood as autocratic and dictatorial, and there is the ever present specter of "Big Brother" keeping a watchful eye on any and all who read the Scriptures.

Authority, however, has been present in the Church since the very beginning, and the apostles were constantly urging those they had placed in charge of the communities to be on their guard so as to prevent the insinuation of false teachings into the pure doctrine of Christ. This was especially evident in the pastoral letters of Paul.

In First Timothy 6:20, he warns Timothy to "guard what has been committed to you." In Second Timothy 2:2, he writes again, "The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses, you must hand on to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others." And he reminds Timothy, "You have followed closely my teaching and my conduct." (2 Tim 3:10)

But despite these warnings and safeguards, Paul knows the frailty of human nature, and how easy it is to be led astray. "The time will come," he writes, "when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth and will wander off to fables." (2 Tim 4:3)

The apostles had passed on a **deposit of faith**, that is, a body of doctrine which was to be continually handed on through the apostles' successors. In Philippians 1:27, Paul speaks of "standing firm in unity of spirit and exerting yourselves with one accord for the faith of the Gospel." And the apostle Jude in verse 3 of his letter, appeals to the Christian community to "fight hard for the faith delivered once for all to the saints."

Just as it was essential to maintain sound **doctrine** in the early Church, it also became necessary to keep a close eye on the Scriptures, for in reality, they are merely an extension of the Church's teachings.

Now it is not demeaning the Scriptures to admit this; nor is it an attempt to lessen their importance. All Christians accept the Scriptures as the living Word of God, but few take the trouble to ever ask themselves what such a statement means.

The joke is told of the Fundamentalist minister, who, during the course of a sermon, held up a copy of the Bible in his hand and exclaimed, "Everything between the covers of this book has been inspired by God." And a voice came back from his audience, "Aye, and the covers also."

The question is, how much of the Bible text can be ascribed to God? Is it every word and phrase, or only the general theme? To arrive at some sort of an answer to this mystery, it might be helpful to look first at the Gospels.

As we read about the early years of the Church in the Acts of the Apostles (cf. Acts 10:34ff; and 13:23ff), we notice that in the teaching of the Christian message, there was established, very early, a basic pattern, or framework, around which, this message could be built.

The announcing of the Good News was developed around the role of John the Baptist, declaring that the Promised One, the Messiah, had at last appeared. It then covered the public life of Christ, culminating in his death, resurrection, and ascension.

This basic presentation was expanded by the first preachers as the circumstances required. Some included the important sayings of the Lord, others highlighted his special teachings, and recounted the miracles he performed. So the

basic framework was maintained by the teaching Church, with parts that could be added according to the occasion of the sermon. It is this same basic account that forms the **core** of the Gospels, and because it **was** the official and universal teaching of the Church, that we know and accept it as authentic truth.

All this, of course, is an over-simplification to the question, but it does give us a starting point, and we can delve into it a little further from this position.

The Synoptic Gospels - those of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which readily admit of being brought under one combined view, because of the similarity of material they use, are a good example to illustrate the way in which they came to be written.

What the three evangelists did was to take the existing framework, which was already in place, and build on it. Matthew took the sayings of Jesus and wove them into his presentation. Mark set out to highlight the idea of the kingdom; while Luke probed deeper into the personal material and gave us the Infancy narrative, and other features which do not appear in the first two accounts.

So the Gospels are the concrete expression of what the Church was teaching at the time they were written. And their quality of being inspired, then, belongs to them in the same way it belonged to the teaching or preaching apostles.

Just as the Church constitutes the Body of Christ, governs with his authority, and is safeguarded from teaching error by the Holy Spirit, so too, the Gospels, and this applies equally to the whole of the New Testament, which expresses this teaching in writing, are also prevented from teaching error.

The Church has always recognized the authenticity

of the four Gospels, for not only has it been aware of their authenticity, it has also preserved them from error and mistranslation by exercising its authority down through the centuries, to safeguard the transmission of the sacred text.

Safeguarding the transmission of the text is not as unimportant as some Bible Christian might think. One really needs to follow the whole question through, for the implications behind the acceptance of an authority which can pronounce on the validity of particular writings, leads one into the difficult situation of admitting that there was a time when there **was** a Church, or body, that had put a seal on what writings were, or were not, to be accepted as inspired. It then becomes a question as to whether that Church still exists somewhere in the world today.

Even after Martin Luther had repudiated the Catholic Church, and railed against what he called, "The true Babylon" and the "den of the devil," he was forced to admit, "We are obliged to yield many things to the Catholics, and one is, that they possess the Word of God which we received from them; otherwise we would have known nothing at all about it."

The exercising of this authority to declare on the sacred text comes from the knowledge and awareness of the Church that it was commissioned by Christ to speak in his name. The Church **alone** has the **right** to declare what writings are genuine and inspired. And, as it did in the first centuries, so it continues to do in the 20th Century.

Just to repeat what I have said elsewhere, those who object to the exercising of this authority, do so only because they themselves do not possess it. And, as we shall see a little later, when we deal with the Canon of Scripture, they have no answer to the question of how one knows which books are inspired,

when they deny the very Church and its authority which has told them.

### THE CATHOLIC ATTITUDE TO THE BIBLE

The second part of this talk looks at the **perceived attitude** of the Catholic Church to the Bible. This can take many different paths, most of which, seem to lead to the conclusion that, until relatively recent times, the Catholic Church was against its people reading the Bible.

This is certainly the case with the Watchtower, which continues to give the outmoded impression that the Catholic Church is opposed to the private reading of Scripture.

In a **WATCHTOWER** article, titled "Combatting Bible Illiteracy in France," the writer lamented the religious situation in France and laid the blame squarely at the feet of the Catholic Church:

Until recent times, Bible illiteracy among the laity was the consistent policy of the Catholic Hierarchy. In 1229, the Council of Toulouse (France) decreed: 'We forbid the laity to have in their possession any copies of the books of the Old and New Testaments.' In 1564, Pope Pius IV forbade the reading of the Bible in the vulgar tongue. In 1897, Pope Leo XIII stated: '. . . if Bibles in the vulgar tongue are authorized without discernment, . . . more harm than good results.' (**WATCHTOWER**, June 1, 1977, p.326)

The **WATCHTOWER** report is not new. It is typical of many such statements that are continually put forward in Watchtower literature. They are, what we might call, half-truths, in that they have been taken out of context and made to say something that was never intended. And the Watchtower is not alone in this. Protestant publications also keep alive the myth that the Catholic Church has tried to prevent its followers from reading the Bible, and has, at times, even forbidden vernacular versions to read.

A small booklet put out by the Protestant Truth Society of London, titled, "The Church of Rome and the 'Word of God,'" by the Rev. Eric C. Last, typifies the hard-line approach to the Catholic attitude to the Bible:

In Evangelical circles there have been some ready to cry out with joy that Rome has clearly changed her position with regard to the Bible. Once it was a forbidden book - now it may be read by all. Progressive Roman theologians are taking more account of the Bible. Surely, we are told, this is a change for the better. Surely, this is a chance of real reformation within the Roman Church, as she now turns to Holy Scripture. [But] just what is the real position today?

Clearly there has been a great change - a change so great as to make Rome's claim to infallibility even more absurd. At the time of the Reformation, to own a Bible in the common tongue was punishable by death. Tyndale's New Testament was condemned as the 'most pernicious poison.' (p.4)

As with the earlier Watchtower report, the Protestant statement is a gross caricature of the Catholic attitude to the Bible. Thankfully, it is confined mainly to the fringe groups in Protestant circles, and does not represent the majority belief. But unfortunately, it is towards these fringe groups, who are the most vocal, that Jehovah's Witnesses seem to gravitate when breaking free of the Watchtower's influence, and are thus more readily susceptible to the anti-Catholic insinuations that flow from these Fundamentalist presses.

The charges against the Catholic Church and its bans on Bible reading, are made by people who are less interested in historical truth than keeping alive the slanders of the Reformation, when this sort of propaganda first saw the light of day.

It is a fact that people will more readily accept what they **want** to believe, rather than what is the truth. I could stand here all day and deny that the Catholic Church has ever forbidden its members to read the Bible, and I would be accused of not knowing what I was talking about.

But if these charges are permitted to go unanswered, the falsehood continues to spread, and the distortions gradually come to be accepted as truth by people who do not bother to check the facts. And the facts are not hard to find; all it takes is a little digging and an entirely different picture emerges.

Lorraine Boettner, the Protestant Fundamentalist, whom I have quoted on a number of occasions, typifies the common belief of many hard-line Protestants when he writes:

The first complete English Bible was translated by John Wycliffe, 'the Morning Star of

the Reformation,' about 1382. Before his time there **was no Bible in English**, although a few fragmentary portions had been translated. (**ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p.94)

Boettner points out that Wycliffe's version was actually a translation of the Latin Vulgate, and **was**, therefore, a translation of a translation. He credits William Tyndale in the years 1525 - 1526, with producing the first English New Testament from the original language.

The remarks by Dr. Boettner, and other critics of the Catholic Church, seem to suggest that English-speaking Christians were deprived of a common-language Bible for more than thirteen hundred years. But in reality, English - as a **written** language, dates from only the middle of the 12th Century; and even at this period, it was still in a fluid state and had at least three major dialects which affected both its pronunciation and spelling. It was a further two hundred years before English came of age, around the time of Geoffrey Chaucer, who died in the year 1400.

And again, John Wycliffe, the "Morning Star of the Reformation," who was a contemporary of Chaucer, translated his Bible **as a Catholic** - for Protestantism, which today puts so much emphasis on his achievements, was still more than a century away.

Dr. Boettner's claim that Wycliffe produced the first complete English Bible is also disputed somewhat by the 16th Century Protestant archbishop, James Ussher, who dates this event almost a century earlier than Wycliffe. And the fact that from the time of the emergence of a **written** English language in the 12th Century, to the middle of the 16th Century, fewer

than one hundred works in English exist today, is no reason to deny that any such translations did not exist in the past.

Although certain Christian groups tend to highlight the relative lateness of English translations, and use this as an argument against the Catholic Church, the real issue actually centers on whether the Church deliberately sought to keep the Bible from English-speaking Catholics.

As early as the 8th Century A.D., the Venerable Bede had translated the **whole** Bible into **Saxon**, and from then on, there was a very slow, but steady procession of translations of either large portions or parts of the Bible text into Anglo-Saxon.

So not only is the claim that Wycliffe's translation was the first version into English shown to be a myth; so also are similar statements that Martin Luther's translation was the first German version.

Long before Luther was born in 1483, the Bible had been translated into the major European languages of the day - France, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Poland, and other countries all had the Bible in the common tongue.

All these translations are conveniently forgotten or ignored by the critics of the Catholic Church. They prefer to accept the fiction that has been handed down to them for the last four hundred years, that the Catholic Church continued to forbid any such translations to be made.

Now there were prohibitions to common-language Bibles, but not because the Church sought to keep Christians ignorant of the truth, or to keep them from reading the Bible. The sole reason for the prohibition has always been directed against **unauthorized** translations. And the reason for this is summed up very clearly in a decree of a non-General Council held at

Oxford in 1408. The decree states:

It is dangerous, as St Jerome declares, to translate the text of Holy Scripture out of one idiom into another, since it is not easy, in translating, to preserve exactly the same meaning in all things . . . We therefore command and ordain that henceforth no one translate any passage of Holy Scripture into English or any other language, in a book or booklet or tract of this kind lately made in the time of said John Wycliffe or since, or that hereafter may be made either in part or wholly, either publicly or privately under pain of excommunication - **until** such translation shall have been approved and allowed by the Diocesan Bishop of the place, or (if need be) by the Provincial Council.

So the prohibition is not against anyone translating the Scriptures into the common tongue, but against any **unauthorized** versions that may deliberately or inadvertently falsify the sacred text. And, however much opponents and critics may deny it, the Catholic Church is the custodian of the Bible, and has been for nearly two thousand years.

What I quoted earlier from Martin Luther, bears repeating. Having repudiated the Catholic Church, he then went on to acknowledge a debt to the Church:

We are obliged to yield many things to the Catholics - (for example) that they possess the Word of God which we received from them; otherwise we would have known nothing about it.

Christians, today, who barely accept the Catholic Church as Christian, would do well to ponder Luther's words, and ask themselves where their Bible came from.

There has to be safeguards on the sacred text, or individuals, with little or no training or other qualifications, can set themselves up as scholars and translate a passage to mean anything they want it to say. The prime example of this is the Watchtower's own **NEW WORLD TRANSLATION**, which has been so changed as to accommodate the Witnesses' own peculiar brand of Christianity.

But this is not the first time the text has been altered to suit the whims and fancies of pseudo-Christian groups; nor is it always a matter of falsifying the sacred text to arrive at a satisfying support for a particular teaching.

Throughout the course of history, all manner of alterations and interpretations to the Word of God have resulted in denials of the divinity of Christ; of the Holy Trinity; the resurrection, the immortality of the soul; the after-life; and just about **every** teaching ever held by the Christian Church.

For many people, the description of the Scriptures as the "sacred" or "holy" Word of God, means little if anything in the pursuit of private interpretation. But then, this is what it is all about. Peter's warning that "no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of private interpretation," (2 Pet 1:20) is conveniently forgotten, and each person becomes a law unto themselves in declaring what a particular text is saying.

However, when we go back into history, we can see that private interpretation was **never** considered the norm, or the right, of the individual. Throughout the ages, scholars have been encouraged to use every means possible to discover what the Bible writers intended to convey in the text, but in

the end, when there was a question of doubt, every scholar was expected to submit to the magisterium, or teaching authority of the Church.

Even today, the emphasis is not so much on what the text was saying two thousand years ago, but on what it is saying to us now. We have to go beyond the literal meaning of words as words, and let them speak to us as part of the **community** of God. They were written for members of the Body of Christ; to give life to the Church; to build it up to be a witness to Christ in the world.

The Church has the right and duty to safeguard and preserve the purity of the text, and to do this it stipulates that all new translations be submitted for approval by a body of competent scholars.

Those who see this as simply another form of dictatorship, are missing the point, and are unable to see the dangers of permitting unauthorized translations to multiply among God's people.

## THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

The canon, or list of books that are accepted as inspired by God raises questions among Christians that can cast doubts on a church's orthodoxy.

That God inspired certain books to be written and included in the Sacred Scriptures is accepted by all Christians today. It is the list itself - the writings that actually make up this list - that causes the dissension among the various churches.

The reason for the controversy is that not all churches

recognize the same list of writings.

Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Eastern churches accept forty-six books of the Old Testament as part of the canon of Scripture, whereas, Protestant churches accept only thirty-nine books. All churches are in agreement on the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.

This discrepancy in the number of Old Testament writings to be accepted as inspired, is closely linked with that of the Apocrypha; but strictly speaking, the formation of the canon is a question in itself, and I will leave the discussion on the Apocrypha until the next section.

What I am concerned with here is the **way** in which the canon - the definitive list of books which go to make up the Bible, as we know it, came to be accepted as inspired by Christians.

In the short space of time available here, I cannot expect to answer all the questions that will be raised by these comments. All I can hope to do is to show that there are many unanswered issues involved that need to be addressed by all Christians who are genuinely seeking the truth.

Perhaps it is necessary to pause for a moment and define some terms, before discussing the question of canonicity. Inspiration and canonicity can be, and are, often confused, but the two words do not mean the same thing.

The word "inspiration" is Latin in origin, and means to "breathe into, or onto." Which brings Jehovah's Witnesses, and many Christians, to speak of the "God-breathed Scriptures." (E.g. **AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING**, p. 832) It refers to the special influence of God on the human writers of the Bible. Catholic teaching on inspiration can hark back to the First Vatican Council of 1870, which described the books of the Bible

as "sacred and canonical . . . because, having been written under the influence of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author, and as such, have been entrusted to the Church."

In more recent times, the Second Vatican Council speaks of inspiration, and in the document on Divine Revelation which was promulgated by Pope Paul VI, on November, 18, 1965, it is expressed in the following manner:

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Holy Mother Church, relying on the belief of the apostles, holds that the books of both the Old and New Testament in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, having been written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn. 20:31; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21; 3:15-16) they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities, so that with him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted. (**DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE REVELATION, C. 3:11**)

Canonicity, on the other hand, describes the recognition of a particular book as being inspired by God, and accepted as a source of revealed truth by the Church.

The canon of the Bible is not something which evolved

overnight. It was spread over a long period of time, and even now, the certainty by which the Church came to know what writings were to be included in the canon, is still a matter of debate among Scripture scholars and theologians.

However, for Catholics, one thing is certain, and that is that any lingering doubts as to what writings constituted the sacred canon, were dispelled by the Council of Trent in 1546, at which time, the Council spelled out what books were to be accepted as inspired and included in the Holy Bible.

The question has been raised to me on a number of occasions as to why it took so long for the Catholic Church to make its definitive pronouncement on the canon. But, as it was in the past with many of the important doctrinal issues, there was simply never any pressing need to speak authoritatively on the particular point in question, until there came some dispute on the issue, either from within or from without the Church. In the case of the canon of Scripture, it came mainly from **outside** the Church, in the person of the Protestant Reformers.

The matter of the canon had risen very early in the Church's life. There had already been discussions on both the Old Testament canon and that of the New Testament canon by the middle to late 2nd Century A.D., and by the year 200 A.D., there were **many** voices raised on a number of issues concerned with the books of the Bible.

Not only the Old Testament canon, but also the New Testament canon came into question as the early Christians sought to establish and gather together the books they believed belonged to the list of inspired writings.

We are accustomed to speak of the "Canon of Holy Scripture," but, in the case of the Old Testament, it is probably

incorrect to speak of a Hebrew canon before the Christian era.

Some thirty years ago, the Protestant scholar, A.C. Sundberg offered convincing evidence that there never was a Palestinian Hebrew canon that existed in the time of Jesus, and which, towards the end of the First Century A.D., was given the stamp of authority by a council of rabbis. In a series of important papers, Sundberg also challenged the commonly-accepted view that distinguished between a shorter Hebrew canon in Palestine, and a longer Septuagint canon for the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria.

Instead of a fixed list of inspired books existing at this period of time, it would appear that the Alexandrian Jews, like their Hebrew cousins, had a large number of sacred books, some of which were recognized as older and more sacred than others. Even before the birth of Jesus, there were many Greek speaking Jews living in Palestine who were using the Greek Septuagint as a collection of **undifferentiated** religious writings **long enough** to be able to make possible a Hebrew revision of them before the Christian era had even begun.

So the Christian Church "received **Scriptures**" from Judaism, but **not** a canon. And these writings were fluid enough to enable certain books, which were to be eventually excluded from the canon, to be briefly elevated to a point where they could be quoted in Jewish circles as if inspired.

In actual fact, the Christian Church had been established for some fifty years before the Old Testament canon was supposedly closed.

We now come to the question as to how we know which books of the Bible are inspired.

The 1963 Watchtower book, **ALL SCRIPTURE IS INSPIRED**

**OF GOD AND BENEFICIAL**, lists some of the criteria for determining the canonicity of the Bible:

First of all, the documents must deal with Jehovah's affairs in the earth, turning men to his worship, and stimulating deep respect for his work and purpose in the earth. They must give evidence of inspiration, that is, be products of holy spirit. (2 Pet 1:21) There must be no appeal to superstition or creature worship, but, rather, an appeal to love and service of God. (pp. 298-299)

The writer goes on to speak of unity and internal harmony in the various books that go to make up the Bible, and, he concludes by saying:

In addition to these basic essentials there are other specific indications for inspiration, and therefore for canonicity, according to the nature of each book's contents, and these have been discussed in the introductory material to each of the Bible books. Also, there are special circumstances that apply to the Hebrew Scriptures, and others to the Christian Greek Scriptures that help in determining the establishing of the Bible canon. (p.299)

The Watchtower appears to be a little more orthodox in determining the canon in its later publications. In **AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING** (1969), and the revised and enlarged two-volume update of this work, **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, it adopts a more in-depth approach that seemingly brings it closer

to traditional Christian thinking. But, sadly, such is not the case.

**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES** goes to great lengths to list as many ancient witnesses as possible to the Hebrew and Christian canons, but after all this show of scholarly backing, it falls back on earlier Watchtower teaching, and concludes:

The real test of canonicity, however, is not how many times or by what non-apostolic writer a certain book has been quoted. The contents of the book itself must give evidence that it is a product of holy spirit. Consequently, it cannot contain superstition or demonism, nor can it encourage creature worship. It must be in total harmony and complete unity with the rest of the Bible, thus supporting the authorship of Jehovah God. Each book must conform to the divine 'pattern of healthful words' and be in harmony with the teachings and activities of Christ Jesus. (Pp. 409-410. See also, **AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING**, p. 292)

In many ways, the Watchtower's understanding of canonicity is similar to that of Protestantism's. And, here again, I am speaking of the more extreme forms of Protestantism, which are generally grouped together under the heading of Fundamentalism.

Like the Witnesses, the Fundamentalists - or **some** of them - give a passing lip-service to the non-apostolic writers or ancient Church Fathers. But, when pressed too hard, they will speedily disown them and revert to a Bible-only mentality that excludes any later influence on the way the various books

and writings came to be gathered together.

Kathleen Boone, in her recent study on Protestant Fundamentalism, **THE BIBLE TELLS THEM SO**, notes this in the opening pages of her book:

For example, Fundamentalists are pleased to view themselves as the legitimate heirs of historical New Testament Christianity . . . But this sense of history is better termed a sense of **heritage**. The New Testament church, the theology and polity of which is described in the canonical text, is considered to be canonical itself, and thus absolute. Only insofar as Christians throughout the centuries demonstrated their fidelity to this model do Fundamentalists give any credence to ecclesiastical tradition. The writings of the Church Fathers, therefore, are read with caution, if they are read at all. The wheat of truth being sifted from the chaff of 'Catholicism.' The Reformers, however, emerge as heroes struggling to restore the golden age of the New Testament. This perception, dubious as it might be, is nevertheless a decisive component of fundamentalist authority. (p. 3)

And yet, it is to these very same Church Fathers that we owe our dependence on what books go to make up the canon of Scripture.

Unlike Jehovah's Witnesses and Protestants, who understandably prefer to reject any Church pronouncements as to what books are to be accepted as canonical, and instead, determine the canonical status of a particular book by its

capacity to communicate religious experience, the Catholic Church establishes the canon entirely by early Christian belief and practice that has come down to us from apostolic times. And this, as we shall see a little later in this talk, is the whole meaning of what Catholics refer to when they speak of Tradition.

The formation of the canon is not as clear cut as we might like it to be, which explains the reason why it can still be disputed after so many centuries.

For Catholics, however, the matter was decided once and for all by the 16th Century, Council of Trent, which formally declared, as an article of faith to be accepted by all Catholics, what writings were to be accepted as inspired.

There was nothing new in the pronouncement of Trent, for the Church had acknowledged for over a thousand years what writings were to be accepted as inspired, and what writings were to be rejected. Just over one hundred years earlier, in 1438, almost a full century before the Reformation began, the Seventeenth General Council of the Church had been convened at Florence, and one of the council enactments was the bull, **Cantate Domino**, which listed the 46 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The reiteration of the Florentine decree at Trent was due to doubt about the binding force of the earlier bull, and it had become necessary to answer yet another challenge to its authority, in this instance, from the Reformers who had begun to reject the deutro-canonical books of the Old Testament.

The criterion for canonical acceptance of the inspired writings was not so much the result of historical reconstruction as a theological decision. Only those writings which were included in the Vulgate, and which had enjoyed continuous use in the Church were finally recognized as part of the revealed

Word of God to his people.

Jehovah's Witnesses, and some of the more vocal Christian denominations, who argue for inspiration and canonicity solely on the basis of internal evidence from the Scriptures themselves, are saying, in effect, that the Bible is self-authenticating. But even the Watchtower's own publications are forced to admit that Scriptural references to canonicity "nowhere give an exact number of books." (**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 408)

The challenges and doubts of the Reformers, of Jehovah's Witnesses, and others, are not new. The canons of the Old and New Testaments were not something that came into being overnight; and Jehovah's Witnesses are completely out of touch with reality when they can confidently state in the face of all available evidence to the contrary that "the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures, therefore, was well fixed by the end of the fifth century B.C.E., containing the same writings that we have today." (**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 407)

Judaism knew of **three** classes of writings: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings, and while **individual** books in these three listings may not have reached their final form, each of the classes appears to have closed before the formation of the next. The first **class** of books, that of the Law, seems to have closed about the end of the fifth century (400 B.C.) - as stated by the Witnesses - but even this is open to question. However, the other two classes were closed much later.

When Hilkiah sent the "Book of the Law" to Josiah (2 Kg. 22:8) and Ezra read the "Book of the Law" to the people (Neh. 8:1) it was generally thought of as referring to the **whole** Law (i.e. Genesis to Deuteronomy) and that this was thereby "fixed" during this period of Jewish history. Scholars have

since concluded that the references are simply to sections or parts of the Pentateuchal tradition, mainly from Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Of the other two classes, the general consensus is that the Prophetical group closed only shortly before the end of the third century B.C., and that the Writings, that is, the third group, sometime during the second century B.C. If we were to consider the deutro-canonical writings of the Catholic Bibles in this third grouping, then the date would be even later; possibly less than a century before the birth of Christ.

The story of how the canon was formed is long and complex, but, as it is not my practice to sidestep difficult and complicated issues, I will try and give a brief summary of how it came about. Remember, this is a summary only, and is not meant to be an in-depth account on the formation of the canon.

Firstly, no canon, or list of inspired books has been revealed to us by God. No Old or New Testament book contains any explicit revelation that it is to be accepted as inspired. I am well aware of such references to "the Word of God"; of "searching the Scriptures"; to the "Scriptures that must be fulfilled"; and that "all Scripture is inspired by God," but we are not told **what** writings go to make up these "Scriptures."

We know, for example, that there were two lists of books in circulation at the time of Jesus which were regarded as the Word of God. The older, more restricted listing, which Jehovah's Witnesses and certain Christian groups would have us believe was closed some - **centuries** before Jesus was born, is called the Palestinian Canon, and contains 39 books in our

current listing.

In Old Testament times, however, the Palestinian Canon had only 22 books, or 24, depending on how the combinations were juggled. By combining books we now accept as separate, such as Ezra and Nehemiah as one book, and by grouping the twelve so-called "minor" prophets as a single unity, the Hebrews came up with 24 books, and by further shuffling, the list could be made to coincide with the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Towards the end of the 2nd Century A.D., Melito, the Bishop of Sardis, in Asia Minor, traveled to the Middle East and to the Bible lands, and in the course of his travels he sought to obtain a first-hand listing of the Old Testament as was accepted **by the Jews**. In a letter to his friend, a certain Onesimus, he wrote:

I learned accurately the books of the Old Testament, and send them to you as written below. Their names are as follows: Of Moses, five books: Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy; Joshua the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth; of Kings, four books; of Chronicles, two; the Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon, Wisdom also, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Job; of Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah; of the twelve prophets, one book, Daniel, Ezekiel, Ezra. From which I have made the extracts, dividing them into six books. (quoted in Eusebius, **ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, 4:26**)

Even at this late date, about 175 A.D., there was still doubt as to what books actually made up the Old Testament canon. Melito's listing follows that of the shorter Hebrew

canon rather than the longer Septuagint listing, and it is interesting to note that he omits Esther, but includes the Wisdom of Solomon. Another list, which we refer to as the Alexandrian canon has 46 books. The two canons are closely linked with what is commonly called the Apocrypha, and as such, I will be discussing them further in the next section.

The Jews, living in Palestine, appear to have accepted just 39 books as inspired, while their Greek-speaking brothers living in Jewish communities **outside** Palestine, especially in Alexandria, continued to accept more recent writings as inspired; and when these expatriate Jews began to translate the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, they also translated these later writings. This Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures is called the Septuagint, or, in abbreviated form as LXX, the Roman numerals for seventy, and harks back to an ancient tradition that it resulted from the combined labors of seventy scholars, each working independently of the other, and each returning an identical, word for word translation of the Hebrew text into Greek. The story was widely circulated and accepted well into the Christian era. While it is without real foundation, it does reflect the esteem in which the translation was held by the early fathers of the Church.

The two canons existed side by side, with the Septuagint gaining wide-spread acceptance among the Jews. By the time of Jesus, the Septuagint was in common use throughout the Greco-Roman world, and it was **this** version that Jesus and his apostles most frequently quoted when they spoke of Scriptural fulfillment.

To the question, how the Jews of the time knew what writings were inspired and others were not, the awareness seems to have derived from their earlier acceptance of men like Moses

as being chosen and sent by God to lead them out of slavery and into the Promised Land.

This conviction that Moses was chosen by God and was therefore a spokesman for God, led the Jews to accept his message as coming from God himself. When this same message was committed to writing, as a permanent record, it too was accepted as the Word of God.

In the same way, the Jews of later years recognized that certain men had been sent by God to proclaim further messages to his people. These prophets, or their disciples, also committed this later word to writing, and so, again, a permanent record was preserved for later generations.

The same situation exists with the remaining books of the Old Testament. The unique position enjoyed by Moses, the Man of God, who saw God face to face, was carried over to a lesser degree by those who came after him. The wise men of Israel the priests and scribes, like Ezra of old, were seen to speak in God's name, and their writings also came to be accepted as coming from God and were added to the sacred canon.

I state again, that I am over-simplifying matters in this summary and that not all Christians would agree with my explanation. But it would seem to be along these lines that acceptance of inspiration and canonicity is best understood.

Just as it was in the early Church, so it was in the synagogue. Canonicity did not just happen. In the case of the Jews, a book was accepted solely on the authority of those who had been chosen to rule Israel in God's name. And the recognition of a particular book or writing depended on its acceptance and usage in the synagogue. In fact, we might say that a particular book or writing was actually "canonized"

by the synagogue. But this process of admission into the collection of sacred writings remains something of a mystery.

The expatriate Jews who lived in Alexandria still followed the spiritual leadership of the Jerusalem rabbis, and yet this faithfulness to their religious heritage did not prevent them from drawing up their own list of sacred writings, and it was not until many years **after** the birth of the Christian Church at Pentecost, that there was any opposition to the Alexandrian canon and its additional list of books. I'll have more to say on the Old Testament Canon in the next section.

The formation of the New Testament canon followed a similar path to that of the Old Testament, but in this case we have a little more evidence available as to the process and selection of books.

Nearly twenty five years ago I wrote a series of articles on the Bible. One of these articles dealt with inspiration, tradition and canonicity. I posed the question as to how the Church came to accept the various books as being inspired by God, and I pointed out that the fact of their being included in the Bible argues to their acceptance by an outside authority. For a book, no matter how exalted its message, is unable to testify to its own inspired character.

The Book of Revelation is generally regarded as the last of the New Testament books to be written. Now even if this book was to have listed every other book in the Bible as inspired and canonical, it would still require an outside authority to attest to its own inspired status.

So the difficulty remains - How can we give a satisfactory answer to this question?

Two statements by the apostle Paul in his letters to the churches may furnish us with a foundation to build upon.

In the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4:16), Paul ends by telling them to pass on his letter to the sister church of Laodicea. And, similarly, at the end of his First Letter to the Thessalonians (5:27), he asks them to make sure it is read to all the faithful.

In both cases, the communities are aware that they have received from Paul a declaration of their faith. The letters, touching upon aspects of their belief, have the weight of apostolic authority behind them, and they are accepted by the church with the knowledge that they express its own basic self-constitution.

The Church, in the broader sense of the universal community, knows now, as it knew then, that these writings are to be accepted as authoritative and inspired, for this is a further development of its early infallible teaching.

The apostolic Church was acutely conscious of its birth from Christ, and those who governed it were actual disciples of Christ. They spoke with authority, conscious that what they taught was the authentic teaching of their risen Lord. So in later times, when the Church came to define the list of books to be held as canonical, it did so with the same awareness of infallibility as was possessed by the apostolic Church.

The defining of the canon of Scripture was not something new, but merely a declaration of what had always been the Church's constant belief.

The early Church recognized the apostles as eyewitnesses to Christ and his teaching, and accepted their word as though coming from Christ himself. (Lk 10:16) So a book coming from an apostle or known disciple of Christ reflected

the faith of the Church, which was of course, apostolic. By the end of the first century, when the last of the apostles had died, the New Testament was complete, in the sense that it was all written down. Although there was some hesitation for many years regarding some of the books whose apostolic origins were not immediately obvious, this uncertainty gradually gave way to conviction, and by the year 200 A.D., the twenty seven books we have today were generally accepted by the Church as part of Sacred Scripture.

But the acceptance of an Old and New Testament canon was by no means unanimous. Doubts persisted on individual books, and the debates continued for almost **another** 200 years. It was not until the late 4th Century, in northern Africa, that the final determination of the canon of Scripture took place at the Council of Hippo (393, A.D.), the Third Council of Carthage, in 397 A.D., and the Fourth Council of Carthage in 419 A.D.

At each of these councils, the bishops re-affirmed the listing of the books that were to be accepted as inspired and canonical. What had hitherto been indistinct and unresolved among some of the earlier Church Fathers, now became subject to common agreement in an ever-increasing wave of acceptance in the Western Church. Acceptance in the Eastern Church was much slower, due to more complex circumstances. But in time, the Western listing was gradually adopted by the majority of Eastern churches, and has remained so until the present day.

The Old Testament listing followed that of the Alexandrian canon, naming the 46 books that are printed in all Catholic Bibles. The 27 books of the New Testament are those that are accepted today by all the Christian churches.

It is well to note here what Jehovah's Witnesses have

to say about early councils and the canon of Scripture. In Volume I of **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, it is stated:

Acknowledging, but by no means establishing the Bible canon that God's holy spirit had authorized, were early councils (Laodicea, 367 C.E. and Chalcedon, 451 C.E.), and so-called church fathers, who were singularly unanimous in accepting the established Jewish canon and in rejecting the Apocryphal Books. (p. 408)

But the Witnesses are sadly astray here and elsewhere when they have the audacity to draw on early Christian sources to defend their arguments against a Church-authority behind the canon of Scripture.

The generally accepted date for the Laodicean council is about 360 A.D., which is about seven years earlier than that given by the Watchtower. And the list of canonical Scriptural books contained in canon 59/60 of the council enactments has been convincingly challenged for its authority.

More than a century ago it was shown that the council enactments were really subject-headings of earlier 4th Century councils. Canon 60, which the Watchtower refers to, adopts substantially the shorter Hebrew canon; while canon 59 forbids the reading of other books as Scripture.

The second council mentioned in the **INSIGHT** article is that of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

Again, this is a poor choice for the Witnesses, as this was the council that settled the controversy on the divine and human natures in Christ, the denial of which is one of the main platforms of the Watchtower. Twenty eight canons were

enacted by this council, but none of them deals with the question of canonicity of Scripture.

The Witnesses then proceed to quote individual support for its arguments, and draws on such figures as Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, Origen, Hillary, Epiphanius, Rufinus and Jerome.

However, the Watchtower barely disguises its scorn for these early Christians when it deliberately sets off the office of **bishop** in front of their names by putting it in inverted commas.

But to answer the Watchtower allegations, it can be admitted, as we have already seen in Melito's listing, that some of these early Christians did question the use of the longer canon. What we must remember however, is that they did not have any authoritative direction to follow.

They themselves were virtually the pioneers. Some of them were under the influence of their Jewish teachers and naturally gravitated towards the shorter canon. Others were asking the questions without the proper tools or guidance to give them the correct answers.

To stress again what I said a few moments ago, by the end of the first century when the last of the apostles had died, the New Testament was already complete. But it was complete **only** in the sense that all the writings were **in existence**. However, they were scattered throughout the Church, and at this time had not been gathered together as a unified whole.

They were **in existence**, but they had not been **collected** by the Church, nor had any pronouncement been made as to their authenticity. It was only after this had taken place, for example, that the Church fathers came into the picture; and,

as they have done on so many occasions, their discussions and debates enabled the Church in later years to speak with such finality on the books that were to be accepted or rejected.

Origen, for example, who died in the middle of the 3rd Century, was involved in many controversies with the Jews. He used only the Hebrew Scriptures in his debates, for the simple reason that it was the Hebrew Bible alone that was recognized by his opponents.

In his correspondence with the early Christian writer, Julius Africanus, Origen defended his use of the Hebrew Scriptures when debating with the Jews. His mention of "our" Scriptures is a reference to the Greek Septuagint. He writes:

I make it my endeavor not to be ignorant of their various readings, lest in my controversies with the Jews I should quote to them what is not found there, even though it be in our Scriptures. For if we are so prepared for them in our discussions, they will not, as is their manner, scornfully laugh at Gentile believers for their ignorance of the true readings as they have them. (**LETTER TO AFRICANUS, paragraph 5**)

Just as the Jews refused to acknowledge Christ and would never have accepted the Christian Scriptures as authoritative, neither did they accept the Septuagint, but relied solely on the Palestinian canon.

It was the same with Jerome, the translator of the Latin Vulgate. Like Melito of Sardis, the 2nd Century bishop whom I mentioned earlier, Jerome had no difficulty in accepting the deuterocanonical books when he lived in the West. It was

only when he came to translate the Vulgate and traveled to Palestine to get closer to the original Hebrew texts that he came under the influence of the Jews and their aversion to the Septuagint. Some of this hostility rubbed off on him and he objected to including the additional writings in his translation.

It was when the discussions had reached their peak that the great Augustine, a contemporary of Jerome, entered the fray.

In the year 397 A.D., he wrote his treatise **ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**, in which he looked at the whole question of canonicity and lent his weight to the long-running debate.

Rather than try to simply summarize Augustine's arguments, I will quote the whole section so as to show some of the intricacies the Bishop of Hippo had to face in dealing with this complex subject:

Now, in regard to the canonical Scriptures, he must follow the judgment of the great number of Catholic churches; and among these, of course, a high place must be given to such as have been thought worthy to be the seat of an apostle and to receive epistles. Accordingly, among the canonical Scriptures he will judge according to the following standard: to prefer those that are received by all the Catholic churches to those which some do not receive. Among those, again, which are not received by all, he will prefer such as have the sanction of the greater number and those of greater authority, to such as are held by the smaller number and those of less authority. If, however, he shall find that some books are held by the greater number of churches, and others by the

churches of greater authority (though this is not a very likely thing to happen), I think that in such a case the authority of the two sides is to be looked upon as equal.

Now the whole canon of Scripture on which we say this judgment is to be exercised, is contained in the following books: Five books of Moses, that is, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy; one book of Joshua the son of Nun; one of Judges; one short book called Ruth, which seems to belong to the beginning of Kings; next, four books of Kings [1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings], and two of Chronicles - these last not following one another, but running parallel, so to speak, and going over the same ground. The books now mentioned are history, which contains a connected narrative of the times, and follows the order of the events. There are other books which seem to follow no regular order, and are connected neither with the order of the preceding books nor with one another, such as Job, and Tobit, and Esther, and Judith, and the two books of Maccabees, and the two of Ezra [i.e., Ezra and Nehemiah], which last look like more like a sequel to the continuous regular history which terminates with the books of Kings and Chronicles. Next are the prophets, in which there is one book of the Psalms of David; and three books of Solomon, namely, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes. For two books, one called Wisdom and the other Ecclesiasticus, are ascribed to Solomon from a certain resemblance of style, but the most likely opinion is that they were written by Jesus

the son of Sirach. Still they are to be reckoned among the prophetical books, since they have attained recognition as being authoritative. The remainder of the books which are strictly called the Prophets: twelve separate books of the prophets which are connected with one another, and having never been disjoined, are reckoned as one book; the names of these prophets are as follows: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; then there are the four greater prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel. The authority of the Old Testament is contained within the limits of these forty-four books. (ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE, 2:8)

Augustine's list of forty-four books coincides with the forty-six books ultimately accepted as inspired, as he combines the two books of Lamentations and Baruch with that of Jeremiah.

It was mainly through the insistence of Augustine that the deuterocanonical books continued to be accepted as canonical, and it was possibly Augustine's powerful influence that led the African councils of Hippo and Carthage to pronounce on their place in the Scriptures.

The African councils were not "ecumenical" or "general" Church councils, and as such, had no binding force on the universal Church. But, as with so many local synods, their pronouncements did not pass un-noticed; and, in later years when the bishops gathered together at Trent in 1545, the council members were aware of what the Church had said in the past, and took the earlier pronouncements of these "local"

churches into consideration and used them to reach their final decision on the books of the canon.

## THE APOCRYPHA

In the previous section I dealt with the Canon of Scripture, the list of inspired writings that go to make up our Bible. But, as Catholics and Protestants are aware, their versions of the Bible differ as to the number of books that are accepted as inspired by God.

Protestant Bibles have only 39 books in the Old Testament, whereas Catholic Bibles have 46. The seven "missing" books are Tobit, Judith, Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, or, as it is sometimes called, Sirach, after the grandfather of the Greek translator of the original Hebrew; Baruch, and the two books of Maccabees. There is also some "supplementary" material to the books of Daniel and Esther, which did not appear in the original Hebrew text. This amounts to 174 extra verses in Daniel, and 107 verses in Esther.

The additional verses in Daniel consist of two lengthy prayers that are inserted into chapter three of the Hebrew Text, and three short stories of Susanna, the statue of Bel, and that of the Dragon, or Serpent, which the Babylonians worshiped as a god.

The additional verses of Esther are actually six extensions to the existing material, and fill out the roles of the principal characters.

Since the 16th Century, Protestants have rejected these additional writings and relegate them to the Apocrypha. Catholics, on the other hand, accept them as inspired and

call them deuterocanonical, so as to distinguish them from books which truly are apocryphal by nature.

It is unfortunate that the term "deutero-canonical," meaning "second canon," implies that these books are somehow of less importance than the proto-canonical (or, first canon) books of the Hebrew Scriptures. In actual fact, the coining of the terms by Sixtus of Sienna in the late 16th Century was meant only to indicate the **chronological priority** of the Hebrew canon over the later Greek collection of writings, and had nothing to do with suggesting an **inferior** list of subsequent books that were never accepted by the Jewish rabbis.

The word "Apocrypha" comes to us from a Greek word meaning "hidden," and is used to describe certain writings which, by their title or contents sought to imitate the inspired books and be included in the canonical list of Scriptures. There was a time in the early Church when it was fashionable to apply it to certain writings outside the canon, which were reserved for the most part for those initiated into one of the many Gnostic sects which were beginning to disrupt the life of the Church. But when the Church ruled against these books, the word "Apocrypha" took on the more sinister meaning it has had ever since.

The use of the term is somewhat confusing to the ordinary person because of the ambiguity of the ancient usage of the word, and the way in which it is used today. It should be noted here that Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses do not usually distinguish between apocryphal and deutero-canonical books of the Bible. Both are lumped together and dismissed as of no account, and their acceptance by the Catholic Church is seen as "adding to the word of God" (Rev. 22:18), and simply one more reason to regard Catholics as heretical.

However, this "head in the sand" attitude does not even begin to raise the question as to how the Church could be misled for more than a thousand years, and why it was only in the 16th Century that these books began to disappear from the Bible.

The formation of the canon was discussed at length in the previous section, but there are a couple of points that need to be restated, and at the risk of repeating myself, it becomes necessary to retrace some of the same material again, and see it this time against the backdrop of the Apocrypha.

The Watchtower's Biblical encyclopedia, **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, has this to say on the Apocrypha:

While in some cases they have certain historical value, any claim for canonicity on the part of these writings is without any solid foundation. The evidence points to a closing of the Hebrew canon following the writing of the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi in the fifth century B.C.E. The Apocryphal writings were never included in the Jewish canon of inspired Scriptures and do not form part of it today.

. . . One of the chief external evidences against the canonicity of the Apocrypha is the fact that none of the Christian Bible writers quoted from these books. While this of itself is not conclusive, inasmuch as their writings are also lacking in quotations from a few books recognized as canonical, such as Esther, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon, yet the fact that not one of these writings of the Apocrypha is quoted even once is certainly significant. (**INSIGHT**, Vol. I, p. 121)

The Watchtower comments would also reflect the general position of the Apocrypha among Protestants today. But it also exhibits an appalling lack of knowledge of the Apocrypha.

Firstly, the Apocrypha is not something that is accepted only by Catholics. The Eastern churches also accept the deuterocanonical books as inspired; while the Anglican church accepts not only the seven deuterocanonical books and the additions to Daniel and Esther, but the books of I and II Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh, as well.

So there is a real need for those who reject the deuterocanonical books to ask the question: "Why the difference?"

The answer lies back at the time of the Reformation. The question of the deuterocanonical books had been settled more than one thousand years earlier, when local councils and synods had spelled out the list of books that were to be accepted as inspired. Although there had still been a few voices raised in uncertainty during this period, there was no longer any serious objections to the deuterocanonicals and they enjoyed the same reverence and authority as did the protocanonical books.

Anyone who has studied a history of texts and versions would be familiar with the story of Jerome, and his translation of the Latin Vulgate. In the year 382 A.D., he had been commissioned by Pope Damasus to make a new translation of the Old Latin version of the Bible, and he began a careful revision of the text, basing it on the Greek Septuagint. He had actually completed the translation of the Psalms when he realized that a translation of a translation was not good enough. Like Melito of Sardis, whom I mentioned earlier, Jerome set out for Jerusalem, not only to obtain a more accurate text, but also to further his knowledge of the Hebrew language.

In Jerusalem, Jerome came under the influence of the Jewish rabbis and their aversion to the Septuagint. His previous acceptance of the Greek text began to change as he spent more and more time with the rabbis, and so too, did his attitude to the deuterocanonical books. He completed his translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the year 405 A.D., and, against his wishes, he also hurriedly translated the deuterocanonical books.

The appearance of the Latin Vulgate was not without its critics. Nor was Jerome's off-handed attitude to the deuterocanonical books. But he found an equally strong-willed opponent in Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, in North Africa. The still-extant correspondence between these two men testify to the clash of personalities over the deuterocanonical issue.

Many of those who use Jerome as an argument against the deuterocanonical books, are unaware that he came full circle in his attitude to these later writings of the Old Testament.

As Jerome later admitted in a letter to his former friend, Rufinus, in 402 A.D., it was never his intention to deny the inspiration of the deuterocanonical books, but to give the opinion of the Jewish rabbis with whom he studied.

Jerome's remarks highlight the difference between the Scripture scholar of the 4th Century and the Protestant Christian of today. For all his real or imagined opposition to the deuterocanonical books, Jerome recognized that in the final analysis it was the Church alone that could make the definitive pronouncement as to whether a particular book should be accepted as inspired, and in the end he put aside his personal feelings and submitted to the Church.

The Protestant Christian, on the other hand, rejects not only the deuterocanonical books themselves, but also the

authority that pronounced on them.

This attitude is altogether unreasonable, and calls for some comment.

As I said a little earlier, in the minds of many Protestants there is no real distinction between the deuterocanonical books and the Apocrypha. Both are of the same cloth, and both are to be condemned. As the Westminster Confession of 1648, stated: "The books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are not part of the canon of Scripture; and therefore of no authority to the Church of God, nor to be other wise approved, or made use of, than any other human writings." And, by grouping these writings in an undistinguished classification, the Protestant scholar John Lightfoot, who died in 1675, was able to contemptuously dismiss them as the "wretched Apocrypha." But if this misunderstanding is not recognized, then the problems associated with the Apocrypha will be insurmountable.

What I want to do is to distinguish between the deuterocanonical books and the apocryphal books and concentrate on the former. I have no argument with the rejection of apocryphal books as such. I have read them for study purposes in the translations of R.H.Charles, in the case of the Old Testament Apocrypha, and M.R.James, in the case of the New Testament Apocrypha, but I have never, and could never give any credence to them. However, the deuterocanonical books are a different story, and I have no hesitation in accepting them, as inspired. In my own case, they are among the most read books of the Old Testament.

Now, it is possible to find doubts expressed about the deuterocanonical books in the early Church. And this is to be expected. I have already mentioned some of the causes.

But, at the **same** time there were also doubts about inspired books of the Old and New Testaments, and strictly speaking, **neither** were laid to rest until the late 4th Century and early 5th Century councils of Carthage and Hippo pronounced on them. These councils were not Ecumenical or General councils, and as such, did not have the full weight of the Church behind them. But the Church is one, and what is said in one part of the world at a particular point in time to a small group of people, can also equally apply to the Church at large.

In the case of the Carthaginian councils, their pronouncements carried enough weight for them to endure for more than a thousand years. And, at the General Councils of Florence, held in 1438, and that of Trent in 1545, the assembled bishops drew on these ancient decrees in putting its authoritative seal on the final canon of Scripture.

Speaking of the canon of Scripture which they had accepted - and this included the deuterocanonical books - the Carthaginian decree reads: "Let this also be made known to our brother and fellow priest, the holy Boniface, Bishop of Rome, or to other priests of those parts, for the confirmation of this canon; for we have learned from the Fathers that we should read these in Church."

Notice what the bishops said. They have "learned from the Fathers," that is, those earlier Christians who were recognized as having the mind of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5), and who were universally accepted as carrying on the apostolic tradition. This was the position taken by the bishops at the Council of Trent, when the criterion for inspiration was the long and continuous use of the various books and their parts in the Church.

These early Fathers had already come to grips with

the question of the deuterocanonical books and the Apocrypha, and what the North African synods were doing was simply confirming what the Church, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, had instinctively come to realize in relation to the deuterocanonical books.

Jehovah's Witnesses continue to grasp at straws, and suggest that there is insufficient evidence to "state categorically that the Apocryphal books were originally included in [the Septuagint]." (**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 121)

But this "insufficient evidence" is insufficient only for the Witnesses themselves. There may be individual manuscripts that lack particular books, but given the current state of our manuscript collection, this is only to be expected. We are speaking of papyrus, vellum, and parchment materials that of their very nature should have perished centuries ago, but which are still preserved today only through the efforts of scholars and scientists who labor to hold onto these precious relics of the past.

Codex Vaticanus, which dates from the mid 4th Century, lacks the two books of Maccabees. But it also lacks parts of Genesis, Second Samuel, and about thirty Psalms.

Codex Sinaiticus, also belonging to the same period, contains the First and Fourth books of Maccabees, but omits the Second and Third books.

And it is the same with the Septuagint. The inclusion of some books and the omission of others bears witness to the fluid state of the text in this early period. Protocanonical, deuterocanonical, and apocryphal writings appear side by side in some manuscripts, and were even quoted as "Scripture" by some of the Fathers, testifying to what I spoke about in the previous section on the canon: that up until the end of the

1st Century A.D., there never was an Alexandrian (Septuagint) canon at all, or a Palestinian (Hebrew) canon, but rather a collection of undifferentiated writings that were considered in some way sacred.

What the Church received from Judaism was "Scriptures," not a canon. And the final determination of the Christian Old Testament canon was an activity of the Church, that took place in North Africa at the councils of Hippo and Carthage at the end of the 4th Century.

These councils gave the Church the first real list of Old Testament books that were to be accepted as inspired writings, and it was not until the 16th Century when these lists were challenged because the Reformers found that Catholics were using deuterocanonical books to answer their objections to certain doctrines, that they cast aside what the Church had accepted for over a thousand years and turned to the Jewish listing that had come into existence some fifty years **after** the establishment of the Christian Church, and at a time when Judaism no longer had any binding influence on the Christian community.

To continue to reject the deuterocanonical books as part of the inspired canon of Scripture, and to persist in calling the books apocryphal and then accuse the Catholic Church and others of deliberately fostering the inclusion of books of questionable authenticity is a blatant distortion of the truth, a complete disregard for the facts, and not worthy of anyone who describes themselves as Christian.

## SECTION 5

## TRADITION

Another word that has nearly as many hang-ups as the Apocrypha, is **Tradition**. Mention tradition, and one immediately associates it with the Catholic Church, and the way in which it has adulterated the pure Word of God by introducing non-Scriptural beliefs into its teachings.

This is another area where Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses agree. Both of them condemn the Catholic Church for introducing **man-made** teachings under the guise of tradition. And, once again, there is that wall of obstinacy that prevents them from listening to or accepting an explanation that would resolve the difficulties they have with this word.

So for the fifth time in this particular talk, we once again enter the field of controversy to examine another grossly misunderstood word that has bedeviled discussions between the churches for centuries.

The importance of tradition in Catholic-Protestant dialogue can be seen in Dr. Loraine Boettner's book, **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**. Dr. Boettner is no lover of Catholicism; in fact, he is vehemently opposed to it, and all he believes it stands for. His firm, fundamentalist outlook makes him a good example of the type of extreme Protestantism to which many Jehovah's Witnesses feel so attracted when they cast off their Watchtower shackles.

Dr. Boettner devotes a whole section of his book to tradition, and describes it as:

The basic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. And, we may add, we believe

that in its use of tradition is to be found the Achilles heel of Roman Catholicism. For it is in this that Romanism finds the authority for its distinctive doctrines. (**ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 75)

In the previous paragraph, Dr. Boettner had stated:

Protestantism holds that the Bible alone is the authoritative and sufficient rule of faith and practice. But Romanism holds that the Bible must be supplemented by a great body of tradition consisting of 14 or 15 apocryphal books or portions of books equivalent to about two-thirds the volume of the New Testament, the voluminous writings of the Greek and Latin church fathers, and a huge collection of church council pronouncements and papal decrees as of equal value and authority - a veritable library in itself. (Ibid. p. 75)

Jehovah's Witnesses view tradition in the same light as Protestantism. Watchtower literature recognizes the Scriptural use of tradition and contrasts this with a supposed Roman Catholic teaching. Needless to say, the Watchtower's portrayal is a caricature of Catholic belief in tradition, and has little basis for giving an accurate description of this important issue.

The Second Vatican Council, which convened in 1962, dealt with the whole question of Revelation, and in November 1965, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation finally appeared.

An article in the **WATCHTOWER** of August 15, 1963, written during the time the council was actually sitting in

session, had for its title, **THE BIBLE, TRADITION, AND YOUR WORSHIP**. The writer asked this question:

Can we go so far as to say that there are traditions outside the Bible that are of equal force to it and are just as essential to the Christian's understanding of God and of his purposes for mankind? To this last question one prominent religion has answered with a decided Yes! At the Council of Trent (A.D. 1545 - 1564) the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church stated that 'according to the belief of the universal Church this supernatural revelation is contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us. ' Then at the opening session of the Second Vatican Council, almost two weeks were absorbed in debating this proposition. Some argued for the established position of the Catholic church, that there are these two distinct sources of revelation - the Scriptures and tradition. Others wished to view tradition only as an exposition or interpretation of Scripture. Thus the questions present themselves: Are both the Bible and tradition sources of divine revelation? Is tradition an indispensable supplement to true worship? (WATCHTOWER, August 15, 1963. p. 485)

The questions asked by the Witnesses give us a good starting point - Are both the Bible and tradition equal sources of divine revelation? Is tradition an indispensable supplement to true worship?

The Second Vatican Council, from which I quoted a

few moments ago, has answered the first question quite clearly. One of the major issues discussed by the council fathers was that on divine revelation. The document was promulgated on November 18, 1965, just three weeks before the council came to its close.

Chapter 2 of the document deals with the question of tradition as part of the whole issue of revelation. And from this chapter I have drawn out the following points which spell out the place of tradition in relation to the written Word of God:

Hence there exists a close connection and communication between sacred tradition and sacred Scripture. For both of them, flowing from the same divine well-spring, in a certain way merge into a unity and tend towards the same end. For sacred Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit. To the successors of the apostles, sacred tradition hands on in its full purity God's Word, which was entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. Thus, led by the light of the Spirit of truth, these successors can, in their preaching, preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently, it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed. Therefore, both sacred tradition and sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence. (DOGMATIC CONSTITUTION ON DIVINE

**REVELATION, C. 2:9)**

Part of the difficulty Protestants have with tradition as a source of revelation stems from the popular concept of associating it with popular legends and customs. So many fanciful impressions spring to mind when tradition is mentioned in Protestant circles, that the in-built resistance to all things Catholic becomes alarmed by any suggestion that it could have the same authority as the written Word of God in the Scriptures.

In the same Watchtower article I quoted from a few moments ago, the Witnesses give us their understanding of this meaning of tradition:

Tradition may be defined as information, opinion, belief or custom handed down by word of mouth or by example. Viewed from this standpoint, it is certainly possible for some traditions to be present in religion to which no objection could be taken. For example, it may be the custom or tradition to hold meetings for worship or Bible study at certain times and on certain days. Following such 'traditions' makes for good order and for the convenience of others, allowing them to develop regular habits as to their worship. But this does not make these traditions **indispensable** to true worship. The times of such meetings can be changed without detracting from one's worship of God. (WATCHTOWER, August 15, 1963, p. 485)

Jehovah's Witnesses concluded their article on tradition by pointing out the way it influenced and shaped the

great doctrines of the Trinity, the immortality of the soul, purgatory, and a hell of torment for the wicked, and asked if these were Bible teachings or human traditions?

The Christian's answer, of course, is that they are Bible teachings - which have been formulated and refined **by** tradition.

Take, for example, the teaching on the Holy Trinity. The fathers of the early Church drew the doctrine from the Scriptures, from the very beginning of the apostolic age. Each of them added their voice to what was known, and the Church accepted what they had to say as being in accordance with the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5) In time, three centuries later, there arose opposition to the teaching from a certain Arius. He sought to deny what the Church had been proclaiming from the time of the apostles. **He** was the dissenter. **He** was denying an accepted truth, and, as was to be expected, he was immediately challenged by the bishops of the Church. Arius refused to accept that he could be in error and sought to divide civil and religious allegiance. When the dispute threatened to disrupt the internal harmony of the empire, a council was convened at Nicaea in 325 A.D., and the 318 assembled bishops not only used the Scriptures to highlight the errors of Arius, but also the writings of the early fathers.

And these same writings are what we refer to as tradition. They are contemporary commentaries on what the Church was teaching and accepting as the living word of God for the Christian people of their own day. They were not merely human traditions, such as the Witnesses' holding meetings at certain times and on certain days of the week, but living witness to Jesus actively guiding his Church through the ages as he had promised.

So it is not a question of Scripture versus tradition, but Scripture **and** tradition giving life to the Church. There is no conflict between the two. One does not supplant the other, nor does one take precedence over the other. I'll explain it another way.

The Gospels are accepted as a record of the life and times of Jesus. They are an authentic witness to the words and teachings of Jesus. The letters of Paul and James, Peter, John and Jude are **commentaries** on the Gospel teaching, setting out an explanation and interpretation of the words of Jesus for the Christians **of the day**. In the same way, the disciples of the apostles, the apostolic fathers and the other early writers offered their authentic voices as **commentaries** on the Word for their own generation. And so it has continued down through the centuries with each new generation building on the foundation of the preceding generations. This is Christ himself, alive and active in his Church, speaking to us today.

**Sola Scriptura**, the "Bible alone" catch-cry, which is itself nowhere to be found in the Bible, nor does it have any warrant **from** the Bible, has stood as an insurmountable obstacle to any reasonable discussion on tradition. The Reformers and their modern-day counterparts accuse the Catholic Church of using tradition as an "instrument in the hands of the clergy for the control of the people." (**ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 76) Loraine Boettner goes on to say:

So the Roman Church in reality places tradition above the Bible, so that the Roman Church is governed, not by the Bible, nor by the Bible and tradition, but by the Church itself which sets up the tradition and says what it means. (Ibid. pp.

76, 77)

Like Jehovah's Witnesses, Dr. Boettner had been careful to point out at the start of the chapter that he and his fellow Protestants did not reject all tradition, but, rather, made **judicious** use of it - "in so far as it accords with Scripture and is founded on truth" (Ibid. p. 76). He also makes the statement that it is necessary to pay heed to the "council pronouncements of the various churches, particularly those of the ancient church and of Reformation days" (Ibid.).

Dr. Boettner's careful wording gives the distinct impression that he is equating the Reformation church with that of the early Church. But, having said all this, he then casts doubts on these same authorities by writing:

The history of the church at large shows all too clearly that church leaders and church councils can and do make mistakes, some of them serious. Consequently their decisions should have no authority except as they are based on Scripture. (ROMAN CATHOLICISM, p. 76)

As I pointed out in an earlier talk, this sort of statement leaves one in a perpetual state of doubt as to whether it is possible **ever** to have the truth. Those early fathers who made these pronouncements certainly believed they were guided by the Holy Spirit, just as were the Bible writers before them. They based their pronouncements on the Scriptures, and the Christians who accepted their word did so in the belief that God was still guiding his Church through these successors

of the apostles. There was never any question of conflict between Jesus guiding his Church through his apostles and Jesus guiding his Church through their successors. The same Spirit was active in both.

Down through the ages these pronouncements continued to be accepted as having the weight of divine authority behind them - until the Reformation - when they were thrown open to question and ultimately rejected by the Reformers. So another dispute arose, this time over the issue of the pre-eminence of Scripture over tradition, but, as I have tried to show, there is no conflict between the two. The document on Revelation which was put forward at the Second Vatican Council, and from which I quoted earlier, made it quite clear that Scripture and tradition exist on equal footing.

Now if, as in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses, and others who hold similar views in regard to the authority of tradition and creeds and Church councils in relation to the sacred Scriptures, there is still a doubt about what I am saying, then there is a real need to carefully examine the testimony of history on these issues to see the implications behind their own beliefs.

Tradition in Catholic theology is not the simple transmission of customs and practices from one generation to the next, but the continuation within the Church of the authentic message of Christ, which is permanently preserved and **developed** in every age by the whole Church for the enrichment of succeeding generations.

What the Church taught in its earliest years is not jettisoned in later years, or at the whim of so-called reformers. Truth is ever constant, and needs only to be re-expressed in more modern language that is readily understandable by the people

to whom it is addressed.

Augustine's famous statement that he would not believe the Gospel except on the authority of the Catholic Church, is itself but an echo of earlier remarks by 2nd Century writers such as Irenaeus and Tertullian, who pointed out that since the heretics were able to misinterpret the books of the Bible for their own ends the emphasis upon interpreting them according to tradition should be used as a safeguard.

Tertullian, for example, spoke of the heretics of his day as "fiddling with the Scriptures," and he wrote:

They base their arguments on the Scriptures. Speaking of faith, they claim that the only basis for discussion is the written word of faith. Thus, they wear down those whose faith is strong, they ensnare the weak, and fill all those in between with doubts. We commence, by laying down as a principle that people should not be allowed to use Scripture as a basis for arguing about the faith. (**A DEMURRER AGAINST THE HERETICS**, c. 15)

And in chapter 19 of the same work, he continues:

As a method, it is wrong to appeal to the Scriptures, since one either cannot reach a decision, or at best, a doubtful one. And even if this were not the case, if one is going to appeal to Scripture, common sense requires that one ask to whom the Scriptures belong? From whom, and by whom, and on what occasion, and to whom was that tradition handed on by which we became Christians. For where the truth

of Christian discipline of faith is found, there is found the truth of Scripture and its interpretation, and of all Christian traditions.

The Protestant churches and Jehovah's Witnesses make a pretense of liberalism in regard to tradition. But, after carefully defining the use of the word in the Scriptures, and highlighting passages that refer to the human traditions of the kind Jesus condemned in the Pharisees, they then denounce the Catholic Church for nullifying the Word of God by following these same **human** traditions.

It is not only the use of the word "tradition" that is found so objectionable, but the fact that Catholics can so blatantly claim another source of revelation as distinct from the Bible. The sixth of the Anglican Articles of Religion, would be acceptable to all good Protestants: "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary, so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man."

Scripture alone is said to be necessary, and this certainly leaves no room for the vagaries of tradition. But this practice of reducing tradition to the level of mere gossip and rumors and then condemning the Catholic Church for subscribing to so unreliable a source of revelation, is a gross distortion of the truth.

In reality, the Catholic Church has always held that tradition is part of the deposit of faith that has been passed on since the beginning.

The Second General Council of Constantinople, which was held in 553 A.D., decreed:

We firmly hold and teach the faith which from the beginning was given to the apostles by our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, and by them proclaimed to the whole world. The Holy Fathers confessed it and explained it and handed it on to the whole Church, particularly when they came together in council.

And the Second General Council of Nicaea, held in the year 787 A.D., even more forcefully proclaimed:

Anyone who does not accept the whole of the Church's tradition, both written and unwritten, is to be condemned.

Tradition is necessarily distinct from Scripture, for the **traditional** word of God cannot be the **written** word of God. Catholics also teach that this traditional word of God is of equal authority with the written word of God, and therein lies the obstacle for Protestants.

The Protestant approach would accept the authority behind the oral tradition in the apostolic Church, but, as with the Jehovah's Witnesses, they teach that all the important traditions were assimilated into Sacred Scripture. The Witnesses express it by saying that these traditions were ". . . not left in oral form to be distorted by the passage of time, but were accurately recorded in the Bible for the benefit of Christians living at later periods." (**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 1119)

But such is not the case. In John's Gospel we are told that "not everything Jesus said and did was recorded in Scripture" (Jn 21:25), and it was for this reason that Jesus founded a Church.

The teachings of Jesus are to be found in the Bible. But the Bible cannot speak for itself. Its word is fixed, and because of this, the words are open to abuse by those who "distort them, as they do the rest of Scripture, to their own ruin." (2 Pet. 3:16)

Paul, in his second letter to Timothy, writes: "The things which you have heard from me through many witnesses you must hand on to trustworthy men who will be able to teach others." (2 Tim. 2:2)

The teachings of these "faithful men" have been recorded in the Bible, and also by the early writers and fathers of the Church, whom I have quoted continuously throughout this series of talks. Having lived in the shadow of the apostles and their immediate disciples, they are an **authentic source** of the revelation of Jesus which has been faithfully handed down to later generations.

It is not a second source of revelation that is in conflict with the Scriptures, but a **complementary** source that necessarily exists side by side **with** the Scriptures. It is the living voice of the Church which has interpreted the Scriptures in every age, from the time of Christ to the present.

The creeds and professions of faith, which I have spoken about in these talks are all part of this tradition, and I contend that the rejection of this source of revelation by the Reformers of the 16th Century was due in no small part to their inability to counter the weight of evidence contained in this tradition.

Catholic teaching on such important issues as the Mass, the Eucharist, Purgatory, and so forth, which could be traced back to Christ and his apostles, was cast aside as of no account, and said to have no warrant from Scripture.

Henceforth, "Scripture Alone" was to be the catch-cry, and nothing else would be acceptable. Tradition became the bogey-word it still is today, and over four centuries later, Christians who have grown up in this neo-Reformation atmosphere, have inherited this hostility towards what is an authentic link with Christ himself.

Contrary to what the 16th Century Reformers taught, and Protestantism still holds today, tradition is not an additional source of information that is at variance with the Bible. Divine tradition can never be opposed to Scripture, nor can there ever be a question of placing more reliance on one or the other, for one is dependent on the other.

The sacred books of the Bible are the sacred books of the Christian Church. They were never meant to belong to individuals apart **from** the Church. Now, for those raised in a Protestant environment, such a statement is tantamount to heresy, and is the very stuff the Reformation was built on. But however unpalatable it may sound to Protestant ears, it is the truth that existed in the beginning, and was held by Christians down to the 16th Century.

When the Reformers rejected the authority of the creeds and the councils of the early Church fathers, and substituted the Bible as the sole "rule of faith," they were left with only half the doctrine of Christ. They had the skeleton of the Bible, but not the flesh of tradition. Each one needs the other to give the fullness of the Christian message. The Reformers retained the Bible and proceeded to enshrine it as the be-all and end-all of revelation, while tradition was discarded and held to be of no account whatsoever.

And this is the situation we have today.

The fact that the last books of the Bible were not

even written until the very end of the first century A.D., and that a further two to three hundred years passed before the final doubts were laid to rest on what books actually constituted the Bible, should give us pause as to how the Church maintained the pure doctrine of Christ in the interim.

The answer is tradition. The word of God in its entirety. The word of God as interpreted and taught by the Church. The same interpretative word that infallibly decreed what books of the Bible were to be accepted as inspired by God. This is the rule of faith for Catholics. The written and unwritten word of God. The Word of God is Jesus himself, alive in the Bible, and alive in the Church. The Bible belongs to the Church. It may be read with profit by people outside the Church, but then they lack the deeper, spiritual discernment that comes from within the community of the faithful.

As one writer put it, they have been shown a door, and they have entered, they have found themselves in the presence of one who says, "you have been reading my book - now let me explain it to you." (CATHOLIC ANSWERS TO BIBLE CHRISTIANS, p. 7)

Or, as the eunuch replied to Philip when he was asked if he understood what he was reading, "How can I, unless someone explains it to me." (Acts 8:31)

Papias, as early Christian writer, whose work **EXPOSITIONS ON THE ORACLES OF THE LORD**, was written around 125 A.D., has given us an insight into how he viewed tradition:

If, then, anyone came, who had been a follower of the elders, I questioned him in regard to the words of the elders - what Andrew or what Peter said, or what was said by Philip, or by Thomas, or

by James, or by John, or by Matthew, or by any other of the disciples of the Lord, and what things Aristion and the presbyter John, the disciples of the Lord, say. For I did not think that what was to be gotten from the books would profit me as much as what came from the living and abiding voice. (Quoted by Eusebius in **HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**, 3:39)

Papias is repeating what I mentioned earlier, that the books of the Bible are fixed, and cannot be questioned. Only the voice of the living Church can be questioned so as to shed light on the written word. And, what we are doing is listening to Jesus **alive** in his Church, as he said he would be (Mt 28:20).

It is the **Church**, the "pillar and foundation of truth" (1 Tim 3:16), that interprets the Word of God. As I mentioned, individuals can read the Bible with profit, and interpret the Bible with profit, but their interpretation must ultimately agree with that of the Church, or what we end up with is the babble of voices we have today, with everyone claiming to be a prophet and able to interpret the Word of the Lord; with all the churches claiming to be the church founded by Jesus Christ.

Is it any wonder that unbelievers are bewildered by such claims? Are those inside the churches unaware of the confusion they cause? All claim to be "Bible Christians." All claim to be led by the Spirit. All claim to be able to interpret the Word of God faithfully. But how many are willing to listen to the voice of the Church. The voice which spoke in the first century? The second century? The third century? And so on down to this very day? If we are to avoid the confusion and disorder that private interpretation brings in

its train, then we have to stop and look at our position.

The Bible tells us that our God is not a God of confusion (1 Cor 13:33), but this statement is ignored as interpreters multiply at an alarming rate. The Corinthian text is applied to everyone else, as the interpreters apply their own meaning to the sacred Word with never a thought for the fathers of the Church, and the creeds and the councils which long ago gave us the authentic meaning to the Word of God.

And that authentic voice is still being heard today as the Catholic Church continues to speak authoritatively, and continues to lead its people on their journey to God.

Thank you for your kind attention.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

THREE DOCTRINES - CATHOLIC ANSWERS TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

BY

JOHN FRANCIS COFFEY

GREETINGS!

I have mentioned on number of occasions the details that led to the publication of my book, **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**. I have spoken of the events that led me to become interested in the Witnesses in the first place, and how this interest developed over the years to the point where I began to plan for the publication of a book on Watchtower doctrines.

The preparation of the material underwent a long

gestation period before it finally saw the light of day in 1979. It had been fully revised and rewritten three times since I first put pen to paper back in early 1968.

I had intended it to be a **magnum opus**, and, at least in manuscript form, it was. But therein lay the problem. In initial discussions with **POLDING PRESS**, which eventually published the book, it was suggested that it might be too long for the general reader who could be seeking something a little more compact. And there was also the question of its potential reader. To give it the widest possible audience among the general public it was felt that a more non-denominational approach would be the best path to follow.

The format of the book lent itself to a natural division into chapters; and, because I am a Catholic, I had included three chapters on what are generally regarded as characteristically "Catholic" doctrines, namely: Purgatory, the Eucharist, and the Virgin Mary.

The editorial committee who read the manuscript were favorably impressed, but they were of the opinion that the three "Catholic" chapters did not really fit into the tight guidelines I had drawn for my study on the Witnesses. If there was to be a shortening of the manuscript for publication purposes, the omission of these chapters would not affect the overall concept of the book as I originally presented it.

As a result of these discussions, the three chapters were omitted from the finished product, and the two chapters on the Watchtower's teachings on Blood Transfusions and on War were drastically condensed into a single Appendix. The editorial committee also mentioned that there was always the possibility that at some future date, if the circumstances warranted it, all the omitted material might be re-included in a new edition.

Thus far, the circumstances have not arisen.

When I first thought of doing this series of talks on Jehovah's Witnesses and the Catholic Church, I had a rush of ideas as to what should or should not be included.

Tape One, **AFTER JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES - WHAT?** was an introductory tape that examined a Jehovah's Witness's alternatives to the Watchtower.

Tape two, **A TESTIMONY OF HISTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**, was an examination of the beginnings of Christianity.

Tape Three discussed the controversial topic of Peter the Rock, and **THE PAPACY**.

Tape Four covered the issue of **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BIBLE**.

After a little more thought on these talks I decided to include a fifth tape. The subject matter was already completed in the form of the three chapters omitted from my book on the Witnesses. For many people, these three subjects, dealing with Purgatory, the Eucharist, and the Virgin Mary, may not be as earth-shattering in their importance as some of the other issues, but they do have their place in discussions between Jehovah's Witnesses and Catholics. And again, they should not be seen in isolation, but as part of the overall view of Christian teaching as it has come down to us from Christ and his apostles.

It is necessary to see these subjects in context. Purgatory, for example, cannot be understood apart from the Christian teaching on the immortality of the human soul, the reality of hell, the effect of sin, and the blessed reward of heaven. Take away any of these other doctrines and purgatory becomes meaningless.

So it is with the Catholic doctrine of Mary as the

Mother of God. It was long ago recognized that this teaching is unintelligible apart from the doctrine of the Deity of Christ. If this is denied, as it is by the Witnesses, then there is no sense in trying to understand anything of the doctrine of Mary as the Mother of God. It stands or falls in relation to what one believes of her Son, Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist, and the teaching that Jesus is truly present under the appearance of bread and wine, arouses as much controversy now, as it has done at any time in the Church's history. And it is still a major stumbling block in Protestant - Catholic dialogue.

In this particular talk I will be looking very closely at these three doctrines and examining them from a Scriptural and historical point of view in an effort to determine the reasons for their rejection in Jehovah's Witness and Protestant circles.

For anyone listening to this cassette tape out of sequence from the preceding tapes in this series, I'll mention again that these talks are intended first and foremost for people involved, or previously involved with Jehovah's Witnesses. Secondly, because many former Witnesses seem to gravitate towards the more prominent fundamentalist-types of religion on leaving the Watchtower's influence, I felt that I needed to present a case for Catholicism as an alternative to these other churches.

I also mentioned in an earlier talk that I had listened to more than 130 individual testimonies from former Jehovah's Witnesses. This number has now grown to well over 150 testimonies, and while some of the finer details may vary from person to person, there are remarkable similarities in many of the testimonies.

I know that out of 3,000,000-plus Jehovah's Witnesses,

150 testimonies can scarcely be considered as representative, but one of the similarities I noticed in these testimonies was the large number of broken marriages that seem to stem directly for the Watchtower's efforts to maintain complete control over its followers.

In an environment where one is under constant surveillance, not only from members of the congregation, but even from one's own family, the pressure to conform, or appear to conform, is almost incomprehensible to someone outside the organization.

The slightest deviation from the Watchtower path brings with it the most serious charges and the threat of disfellowshipping. And in a religion which is keyed up in anticipation for the coming battle of Armageddon and the Millennial reign of Christ, the threat of disfellowshipping puts one into the terrifying situation where all that is left is the prospect of annihilation, with all hope of sharing in an earthly paradise lost forever.

Is it any wonder that disfellowshipping is such a powerful tool to guarantee conformity?

A second similarity I noticed in the testimonies was the number of ex-Witnesses who stated that they had been former Catholics prior to their involvement with Jehovah's Witnesses. In the majority of cases, it is easy to see that the commitment to Catholicism had been very superficial, and in some cases, almost non-existent. I also noticed that one or two people appeared to be projecting their Watchtower image of Catholicism back to their pre-Witness days. So the picture was far from accurate.

Questions such as: "What did the Church ever do for me?" And, "Where is the care and concern for the poor and the

needy?" And, "Where is the love and warmth and fellowship in the Catholic Church?" These are the standard remarks one often makes to justify a shift of allegiance.

There is never an acknowledgment of personal omission. One never hears the statement, "I failed to contribute anything to the life of the Church," or, "I never bothered to try and increase my understanding of the Catholic faith after leaving school."

The words of former U.S. President John F. Kennedy, which ran, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country," apply equally to one's religion. There has to be input from the people if the Church is to continue to grow. If everyone is simply taking and giving nothing in return, the life of the Church is being drained, and it will very soon stagnate.

So a former Jehovah's Witness, who can stand up and say they had been raised a Catholic, and then proceed to show that Catholicism was a closed book to them, can scarcely qualify as a representative Catholic.

Now there are some, even in informed Catholic circles, who are ready to jettison certain doctrines for the sake of expediency. If a "unity" can be achieved by leaving aside contentious issues, then these doctrines should be put in a closet and left there for a later generation to deal with.

But Catholicism is not only a way of life, it is also a system of beliefs. What distinguishes a Catholic from among the multitude of other denominations is what they believe. And apart from the **major** doctrines that are held in common with that of mainstream Protestantism, Catholics have a whole host of teachings that other churches totally reject as unscriptural. And it is these teachings that bring down most of the

condemnation from its critics.

This particular talk examines some of these "Catholic" teachings from a Scriptural and historical point of view, so as to trace them back to their beginnings and see what grounds the Catholic Church has for accepting them as articles of faith.

The three doctrines that have been chosen for this talk elicit some of the most virulent opposition from Protestant circles, so it is hard to remain objective when discussing them. But each doctrine is an article of faith, and is part and parcel of Catholicism, so it is sometimes necessary to take the time to present a reasoned explanation of these teachings in order to give the critics a chance to have them explained in a calm and orderly manner

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PURGATORY

The first of the three doctrines to be discussed is that of purgatory. I mentioned in an earlier talk that I believe the question of the papacy is one of the most controversial issues in Protestant - Catholic dialogue. With the subject of purgatory, however, we enter one of the most misunderstood areas of discussion. And what I am seeking to do is to examine the teaching carefully, and to look at the problem areas in greater detail in order to clarify some of the false impressions that have grown up around this doctrine.

For over four hundred years the Roman Catholic teaching

on purgatory has stood as one of the major obstacles to Christian unity; and though modern-day ecumenism has helped to mellow the more virulent forms of criticism, the doctrine still remains completely unacceptable to Christians of other denominations.

Since Protestantism sees purgatory as unscriptural, and Catholicism has declared it to be an article of faith, Christian unity may seem a long way off. But the Holy Spirit, who has inspired this urge for unity among the people of God, will surely find the means to bring it to fruition.

Opposition to purgatory is often based upon a misunderstanding of the nature of the purification; and, at other times, it is merely the name that is objected to. The inclusion of this subject in a talk designed for interdenominational discussion, therefore, has a twofold purpose. Not only is it meant to answer the Jehovah's Witnesses objections to purgatory - many of which are used by contemporary Protestantism, but also to clear away misconceptions of purgatory so that it may not be the bogey it was in the past.

If, at the end of this analysis, the doctrine remains unacceptable, it is to be hoped that it may no longer be regarded as entirely unreasonable.

The first step in clearing away misconceptions is to give a correct definition of the doctrine of purgatory, and then give a short explanation of the doctrine, to make it more easily understood.

The **OXFORD DICTIONARY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH**, speaking of the Roman Catholic teaching on purgatory, defines it as:

The place or state of temporal punishment, where those who have died in the grace of God expiate their unforgiven venial sins and undergo such

punishment as is still due to forgiven sins, before being admitted to the Beatific Vision. (2nd. Edition, 1974, p. 1194)

Leaving aside, for the moment, the technical terms used in the dictionary's description of purgatory, the definition covers the Catholic teaching quite well.

The word "purgatory" comes to us from the Latin **purgare** (to cleanse), and it describes the purifying process whereby the soul reaches the perfection necessary to enter heaven.

To repeat what I said at the start of this talk, the doctrine of purgatory cannot be understood in isolation from the teachings on the immortality of the human soul, the effect of sin, the reality of hell, and the blessed reward of heaven. So when Jehovah's Witnesses, and certain Protestants, deny and ridicule Catholic belief in purgatory, they do so because of a rejection or false view of one or another of these equally important teachings.

Jehovah's Witnesses are doubly handicapped in this regard as they virtually have nothing in common with orthodox Christianity on any of these doctrines. There is no way purgatory could ever receive a sympathetic hearing from the Witnesses for one has only to glance at Watchtower comments on purgatory to see how foreign it is to them, and how far removed they are from historical Christianity.

In the book, **WHAT HAS RELIGION DONE FOR MANKIND?** the Witnesses state:

[Pope] Gregory I (A.D. 595 - 604) was the first to discover 'purgatory'. It was by means of the apparitions and visions which he related in his

dialogues that he discovered it. He claimed his discovery was because 'the end of the world was at hand, and the nearer we came to the other [world] the more we discovered it.' (P. 274)

Another statement appeared in an article in the Watchtower, dealing with forgiveness of sin. After a brief discussion on the effects of sin and forgiveness, the article went on to attack the Catholic Church over its teachings on indulgences, the immortality of the soul, and purgatory, and the section concluded:

More than that, not only does the Bible have nothing to say about indulgences and an immortal soul, but it likewise has nothing to say about such a place as purgatory. It tells of God's creating heaven and earth, but never mentions purgatory, the word not occurring in the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. (THE WATCHTOWER, November 15, 1966, p. 680)

Although the doctrine of purgatory is rejected by the majority of Protestants, many of them still retain an echo of this ancient belief. And those Christians who do perform the charitable custom of offering prayers for the dead, but balk at the idea of a purgatory, would do well to consider the implications behind their prayers.

There is no difference in praying for a dead person at the open coffin, or at the graveside prior to burial, or praying for that same person five years or twenty years later. If the souls of those for whom they are praying are already

in heaven, then their prayers are unnecessary; and if, on the other hand, these souls are in hell, the prayers offered on their behalf can no longer avail them.

It is possible, of course, to pray for the dead while rejecting the idea of purgatory, but when one steps back and examines the history of this custom, then one becomes acutely aware that there is something missing in Protestantism today.

One of the earliest references to praying for the dead is to be found in the writings of the third century apologist, Tertullian. Born around 160 A.D. at Carthage in North Africa, Tertullian died about 225 A.D. One of his lesser-known works is **THE SOLDIER'S CROWN**, or **THE SOLDIER'S WREATH**, which refers to the laurel wreath given as a prize to the victor. In this work, which he wrote about 203 A.D., Tertullian speaks of some of the customs in the Church, and how they are accepted without question as authentic Christian teachings, even though they lack **positive** Scriptural backing.

He mentions features in the administering of baptism, and the Eucharist, that had been adopted everywhere among the churches, and he goes on to speak of praying for the dead:

As often as the anniversary comes around,  
we make offerings for the dead, as birthday honors..

(**THE SOLDIER'S WREATH**, 3:4)

From about the same time period, Hippolytus, another early Christian writer, refers to praying for the dead in the liturgy of the Eucharist.

Cyprian of Carthage, who was born about the year 200 A.D., and who was bishop of Carthage until his martyrdom in 258 A.D., teaches that penitents who die before reception of

reconciliation must perform the remainder of any atonement in the other world; whereas martyrdom cleanses a person completely. (Ep. 55:20)

A century later and the great Augustine answered the objections to everlasting punishment in hell, and he distinguished between **partial** atonement in this life, and full atonement in the next:

Some suffer temporal punishments only in this life, others only after death, still others both in life and after death, but always before this most strict and most final court. (**CITY OF GOD**, Book 21, ch. 13)

In other writings he speaks of an "improving and cleansing fire," an "intermediate" place where expiation can be made for any failure to render full atonement for sin in this life. Augustine also stresses that this purification will come to an end, for he writes:

Let purification punishments be counted on only before that last and terrible judgment (**CITY OF GOD**, Book 21, chapters 13, 16)

Yet another early witness to the ancient Christian faith, which is often overlooked or ignored even by many of today's Christians, is preserved in the Roman catacombs, or underground cemeteries, which were used extensively from the time of Nero's persecution in the First Century, to that of Diocletian in the early Fourth Century.

Not only were the catacombs used as underground

cemeteries, but in times of persecution, the larger chambers were also used as meeting places where the liturgical celebrations could be carried out with less fear of interruption. The Mass was also offered for the souls of these interred there.

The vast network of subterranean passages and chambers, which is estimated to extend for some fourteen hundred kilometers under the city of Rome, contains irrefutable evidence of the beliefs of the time.

Pictorial symbols abound on the terracotta and marble slabs used to enclose the bodies. The most common symbols are the peacock, representing the beauty and immortality of the soul; and that of the lion, signifying victory over human passions. And, there are other symbols which are more readily identifiable to today's Christians.

The **CRI/RHO** monogram, looking like a capital P on top of an asterisk, is one of the symbols for Christ, and was widely used in the catacombs. Another well-known symbol was that of the fish, in Greek, **ichthus**, and it was from the Greek letters of this word that the early Christians formed the acrostic, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

Still another symbol was that of the dove, and this is even more widely used today to represent the Holy Spirit.

But it is the inscriptions themselves that are very revealing, for they bear vivid testimony to the practice of praying for the dead, and seeking the intercession of those who were known to have lived holy lives and who were already looked upon as being with God.

All this is part of what Catholics call the "Communion of Saints." The apostle Paul tells us that **all** Christians who are baptized into the body of Christ become members one of the other; (Eph. 4:25; 1 Cor 12:12) and are exhorted to pray for

one another in such texts as Romans 15:30; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:13; and 1 Timothy 2:1.

The efficacy of these prayers does not cease with death, and the catacomb inscriptions are filled with assurance that those who "die in Christ" are still in a position to be helped by our prayers, and to help us by their prayers.

This praying for the dead is not new. Nor is it a pagan practice as Jehovah's Witnesses would have us believe. (Cf. **IS THIS LIFE ALL THERE IS?**, ch. 7) The Jews, although having no direct knowledge of anything resembling a purgatorial state, nevertheless believed that it was possible to help the dead by prayers and expiatory sacrifices. This is the substance of the passage in the Second Book of Maccabees, which speaks of the aftermath of a series of battles when the victorious Judas Maccabeus discovered pagan amulets concealed on the bodies of some of his slain soldiers.

It was this act of cupidity that had led to their death, but the author tells us that Judas believed this lack of trust in God would be forgiven, and for this reason he:

Took up a collection among his soldiers, amounting to two thousand drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection of the dead in view; for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been useless and foolish to pray for them in death. But he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that

they might be freed from their sin, (2 Macc. 12:43-46).

Second Maccabees was written around the middle of the 2nd Century B.C., and whether or not one accepts it as inspired, the passage offers a striking testimony to the then-current Jewish belief in the efficacy of prayers and sacrifices for the dead.

This is the belief expressed in a letter of Pope Innocent IV, who died in 1254 A.D., to the Bishop of Tusculum, the Papal Legate to the Greeks, and subsequently ratified in later letters and councils, especially the Councils of Florence (A.D. 1431-1445), and at Trent, notably the 25th session held in 1563. The letter, in part, reads:

And the Greeks themselves are said to believe truly and without doubt, and to affirm that the souls of those who have undertaken penance but not completed it, or who die without mortal sin but with venial and minor sins, are cleansed after death, and can be helped by the intercession of the Church.

Because, however, they say that the place of purgation has not been shown them with certainty and by name by their teachers, we now wish that that place which according to the tradition and authority of the Holy Fathers is called Purgatory, should by them, also be called by this name.

For in that temporary fire, sins, not indeed mortal or capital sins not previously remitted by penance, but lesser sins which still weigh upon us, although forgiven in this life, are purged. (LETTER

## of POPE INNOCENT IV to the BISHOP OF TUSCULUM)

The major differences between Protestant and Watchtower opposition to purgatory stems from the Witnesses' denial that man possesses an immortal soul. According to Watchtower teaching, man becomes non-existent at death, so a purgatorial state is meaningless:

What, then, about Purgatory? This is said to be a place where human souls are conscious and going through a fiery purging after death. Since the Bible clearly shows that the dead are unconscious, how could God be tormenting anyone in such a place? Actually, neither the word 'purgatory' nor the idea of a 'purgatory' occurs in the Bible. (THE TRUTH THAT LEADS TO EVERLASTING LIFE, p. 44)

Since the denial of an immortal soul negates any need for a purgatory, a discussion with the Witnesses would normally terminate at this point. However, the statement that the **word** "purgatory" and the idea of a purgatory are not to be found in the Bible, calls for some comment.

Although it is true that the **word** "purgatory" does not appear in the Bible, this does not mean that there is no Scriptural warrant for the **idea** of an intermediate state of purification after death.

On the contrary, if it is true that a person possesses an immortal soul - a fact well-grounded in Scripture - it is also true that ~~there~~ **is** sufficient evidence to indicate that there is a purgatory.

Belief in an immortal soul supposes due reward

immediately after death; either heaven for the good, or hell for the wicked. But what of those whose lives do not merit so severe a punishment as hell, nor are yet blameless enough for immediate entry into heaven? And it is at this point that Protestantism and Catholicism part company.

Lorraine Boettner, the Protestant theologian, whom I have continuously quoted as representing the fundamentalist approach to Christianity, devotes a whole chapter to purgatory in his book, **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**. Answering the question as to how a Christian is made ready for heaven, he quotes the Westminster Standards, which reads:

And if it be doubted that holiness can be attained in a single moment, let it be remembered that recovery from disease is ordinarily a process, but when Christ said, 'I will, be thou made clean,' even the leper was cleansed in an instant. **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 232)

Dr. Boettner had already dismissed any need for praying for the dead, and had described it as a superstitious practice:

In defense of this doctrine [i.e. purgatory] Roman Catholics lay considerable stress upon the fact that the custom of praying for the dead prevailed early and long in the church. Such prayers, it is said, take for granted that the dead need our prayers, and that they are not immediately in heaven. But the fact is that prayer for the dead is merely another superstitious practice which is entirely without Scriptural support. This was one of the early

corruptions introduced into the church from heathenism. It will not do to argue from one corruption to support another. (Ibid. p. 231)

Dr. Boettner gives no indication as to how **early** this practice of praying for the dead crept into the Christian Church - but the big problem is, it is still with us. I have already shown from the references in the catacombs that this practice of praying for the dead was **commonplace** in the Second Century and even earlier, for the catacombs came into use with the persecutions which followed the burning of Rome in 64 A.D.

So the Church has **continued** the practice of praying for the dead since the time of the apostles themselves, and this "error" has not only been **permitted** to continue, but to be encouraged.

So from its earliest infancy until its present-day maturity, the Church has been in error! How absurd!

Isn't it more plausible to accept that the Reformers made a mistake, and were too precipitous in abandoning so many of the Church's earliest beliefs?

It is not a question of asking when the Church first adopted belief in purgatory and praying for the dead, but when these beliefs were first denied.

Surely, if a belief had survived for fourteen hundred years prior to the Reformation, we are entitled to accept it as authentic Christianity. Or had the Church itself been so steeped in error that it had been incapable of distinguishing the truth from the error?

I have raised these matters again and again throughout this series of talks, and will continue to do so, for they raise the question of the testimony of history, and how the early

Church understood a particular teaching. When we examine that same teaching today, we find it is denied by so many professing Christians that those who still accept it are labeled as heretics.

This is not unity. This is Christianity showing its stubbornness - no yielding; no bending; no compromise.

As I said at the start of this section, acceptance of purgatory is dependent on one's belief in other areas. It cannot be understood in isolation. If belief in an immortal soul is an essential prerequisite to an acceptance of purgatory, so also is an understanding of the effects of sin. And once again, we have differences of opinion from all sides as to the nature of sin; its reality; its effects; and the means God has given us to overcome sin and be restored to his friendship.

There is a whole theology on sin, and, as might be expected, neither Protestants or Jehovah's Witnesses agree with Catholics on this issue. But, if we are to have some understanding of the doctrine of purgatory, it is necessary to have some understanding of the nature of sin.

There are some who would argue against any **degrees** of sin. Stealing, for example, is sin - end of story. They see no difference between a man who steals fruit from an orchard to overcome pangs of hunger, than the person who painstakingly plans and executes a bank robbery. Now against this kind of reasoning, one cannot hope to make much headway.

Surprisingly, the Witnesses' understanding of sin is perhaps the closest **any** of their teachings come to that of orthodox Christianity. They can speak of sin as:

Anything not in harmony with, hence contrary to God's personality, standards, ways, and will;

anything marring one's relationship with God. It may be in word, in deed, or failing to do what should be done . . . Lack of faith in God is a major sin, showing as it does, distrust of him or lack of confidence in his ability to perform. (**INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES** p. 962)

The Witnesses also describe the effects of sin as:

Putting man out of harmony with his Creator. It thereby damaged not only his relations with God, but also his relations with the rest of God's creation, including damage to man's own self, to his mind, heart and body. (Ibid. p. 964)

The Watchtower speaks of "comparative gravity of wrongdoing" (**Insight**, p. 968), and mentions the "sin that incurs death" (**Insight**, p. 969), which is a reference to 1 John 5:16. And it is this text which helps to give us some understanding of why there **should** be a purgatory.

All sin is an affront to God; but not all sin "incurs death," or, in Catholic terminology, not all sin is "mortal."

The more-serious, or "mortal" sin, if unforgiven at death, alienates a person from the love of God and carries the terrible penalty of hell.

The less-serious, or "venial" sin, while not completely severing a person's friendship with God, stands as a barrier between them and God, and must be removed before they can enter God's presence.

Just as civil courts impose the death penalty for capital crimes of murder and treason, and punish minor offenses,

such as traffic infringements, by means of a fine, God's justice, which exacts due penalty for deliberate disobedience to his commandments, is no less in evidence for minor transgressions.

God does not permit us to sin with impunity, nor will he overlook our "minor" sins as though they did not matter. **Every** sin carries a penalty, and the punishment attached to the sin varies in accordance with the gravity of the offense.

Even after a person has been justified by grace, the "debt of punishment they have incurred, may not be fully canceled, and there remains the obligation of making **full satisfaction** for their sin, either in this life, or in purgatory.

That God may forgive an offense, yet still exact punishment, is clear from the story of David and Bathsheba. When the prophet Nathan rebuked the king for causing the death of Uriah, David repented. Nathan told him:

The Lord on his part has forgiven your sin: you shall not die. But since you have utterly spurned the Lord by this deed, the child born to you must surely die. (2 Sam. 12:13-14)

As the Lord Jesus warns us, we are to be held accountable for every idle word (Mt. 12:36; Rom. 2:6); and, as "nothing unclean can enter heaven" (Rev. 21:27), even the smallest of sins, by which we fall short of the perfection demanded by Christ (Mt. 5:48), must be cleansed away before we can enter heaven.

In Catholic theology, this cleansing process, this purification of the soul, takes place in some intermediate state, which, for want of a better word, is called "purgatory" - from the Latin **purgare**, meaning "to cleanse."

Although the Scriptural evidence for a purgatorial state, which the Protestant Reformers rejected as inconclusive, may not be as overwhelming as it is for the teachings on the Holy Trinity, or the immortality of the soul, or hell, or other Christian doctrines, it nevertheless carries a certain weight and validity when used in conjunction with what has been the traditional teaching of the Church for more than seventeen centuries.

The possibility of repentance and expiation after death, which is unnecessary if the soul is already in heaven, and impossible if the soul is in hell, may be implied from Christ's words to the Pharisees:

Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks a word against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. (Mt. 12:32)

Commenting on this verse, Pope Gregory the Great, responded to a question from his childhood friend, the deacon, Peter. The question was: "I would like to know whether or not we must believe in a purgatorial fire after death?" Gregory's reply was:

Everyone is presented in judgment just as he is when he departs this life. But nevertheless, it must be believed that there is, for the sake of certain lesser faults, a purgatorial fire before the judgment, in view of the fact that Truth does say that if anyone speak blasphemy against the Holy Spirit it will be forgiven him neither in this world nor

in that to come. In this statement we are given to understand that some faults can be forgiven in this world and some in the world to come. For if something is denied to one in particular, the intellect logically infers that it is granted for some others. But, as I said before, this must be believed to be a possible disposition for small and lesser faults. (DIALOGUES, 4,40-41)

A parable of Jesus that stresses the need to be reconciled to our accusers while there is still time, has long been associated with the doctrine of purgatory:

If you are to go with your opponent before a magistrate, make an effort to settle the matter on the way; otherwise your opponent will turn you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the constable, and the constable throw you into prison. I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny. (Lk 12:58-59)

In the Old Testament, the underworld (**sheol**) was sometimes referred to as a "prison", as in Isaiah 24:22; and the early Christian Fathers applied this image to purgatory. Commenting on this text from Luke's Gospel, Tertullian, who died around 225 A.D., wrote:

Therefore, since we understand that 'prison' indicated in the Gospel, to be the underworld, and interpret the 'uttermost farthing' as meaning every small sin which has to be expiated there in the interval before the resurrection, no one will doubt

that the soul in the underworld pays some price, without prejudice to the fulfillment of the process at the resurrection, which also will be carried out through the medium of the flesh. (ON THE SOUL, 58)

Another oft-quoted text in favor of the doctrine of an intermediate state of purification is that from First Corinthians. Speaking of the foundation of the faith which he had laid, Paul tells us that the foundation is none other than Christ himself:

If anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or straw, the work of each will come to light, for the day will disclose it. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If the work stands that someone built upon the foundation, that person will receive a wage. But if someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss; the person will be saved, but only as through fire. (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

The fire which Paul speaks of cannot be that of hell, for out of hell there is no redemption. The text from First Corinthians has been used for many years to support the doctrine of purgatory, but this is not what Paul is referring to. Actually, the apostle is warning of the judgment at the **parousia** and the "revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in blazing fire;" (1 Thess. 1:7) when he is to render to each person according to their works. (Rom. 2:6; 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10)

The reason the passage came to be regarded as a reference to purgatory was the mention of "loss" - "If someone's work is burned up, that one will suffer loss. . . ."

Paul speaks of "loss," which is spoken of as temporary, for the person "will be saved, but only as through fire."

Although the thrust of the passage deals with the cleansing fire of the **parousia**, when Christ returns in glory, it has been used on **another plane** to denote a soul's temporary failure to gain **immediate** entry into the presence of God, and the purifying expiation for all past or unrepentant venial, or minor, sins.

As another early Christian writer, Clement of Alexandria, who died about the year 216 A.D., puts it:

We say that fire sanctifies . . . the souls of sinners, meaning, not the consuming fire of a furnace, but the reasonable fire which penetrates the soul which passes through the fire. (MISCELLANY, 7, 6:34)

Despite the lurid descriptions of the fearful sufferings of souls in purgatory, fostered by over-imaginative Catholics, and further distorted by over-zealous Protestants, purgatory is not some sort of lesser hell. Nor it is to be likened to a temporary hell, out of which one gains eventual release.

The Witnesses' misstatement of Catholic belief in purgatory as a place of "fiery purging" does nothing to dispel these misconceptions; nor is it in accordance with the facts.

Clement of Alexandria, whom I quoted a few moments ago, was able to write:

But our chastisement by Providence has been that of children by a teacher or a father. God does not take vengeance, which is the requital of evil for evil, but he chastises for the benefit of the chastised. (MISCELLANY, 7, 16 (102))

In more recent years, another writer has stated:

Purification by fire is a biblical image, rich in symbolism. But there is nothing in the Bible or in any defined dogma of the Church which obliges us to believe in any material fire in Purgatory, or, that it is a 'place' in our spatial meaning of the word. It would certainly be much nearer the truth to see purgatory as in line with those times and states of purification of their faith and love which are experienced by all religious people who are seriously treading the path of total adherence to God. (A NEW LOOK AT PURGATORY, by Leo Watt, O.F.M., pp. 6-7)

Purgatory, then, is the remedial means provided by God for the sanctification of those souls that fall short of the perfection necessary for one's immediate entry into heaven.

It is closely linked to one's understanding of sin, and the way in which sin alienates a person from God.

If, after weighing the evidence I have presented in this talk, the doctrine remains unacceptable, the reason may be due, in part, to our imperfect realization of the holiness of God and the evil of sin.

### THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE EUCHARIST

All Christian religions commemorate in some way the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, which he instituted on the night of his betrayal.

For some Christians, like the Roman Catholics, ~~it~~ is celebrated as a daily event; for others, like the majority of Protestant denominations, it is celebrated weekly. Jehovah's Witnesses also have a Communion Service, which they call the Lord's Evening Meal, or the Memorial Supper, but it is commemorated only once a year on the Jewish calendar date of the 14th Nisan,

Various aspects of the Watchtower's teaching on the Lord's Evening Meal are treated in **AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING**, pp. 1075-1078; and in the more recent **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES** Vol. 2, pp. 268-271. But an earlier 1966 book, **LIFE EVERLASTING IN FREEDOM OF THE SONS OF GOD**, had already gone into some detail to explain their views on this remembrance meal (pp. 120-156).

The Witnesses' understanding of the Lord's Supper is basically that of Evangelical Christianity; the most significant difference being the Witnesses' restricting the actual partaking of the prepared bread and wine to the "spirit-begotten" members who, "expect to leave their earthly residence

forever and become united with the Bridegroom in the heavens."  
(LIFE EVERLASTING, p. 146)

When we come to the question of how one knows whether he or she is eligible to partake of the Lord's evening meal, we receive the following answer:

There was a time when the question of whether one should partake of the Lord's evening meal or not did not need to be asked. In the early Christian congregation all dedicated and baptized Christians became members of the body of Christ, were anointed by holy spirit, and gave proof of it by their being able to use one or more of the miraculous gifts of the spirit, such as healing, speaking in tongues, interpreting tongues, and so forth. So long as these gifts were being imparted it was clear to all who should partake of the bread and wine at the Lord's evening meal. (WATCHTOWER, March 15, 1961, p. 166)

The Witnesses' interpretation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as a means of determining who should receive the Eucharist is wholly without foundation. There is no evidence that **every** Christian received one or another of these gifts; in fact, it would appear that they were only given to a few, and then, only as a sign for unbelievers so as to bring them to a knowledge of the truth.

Paul asks if all are apostles, or if all are prophets, if all are teachers, or if all work miracles? That the Corinthians were seeking to attain these gifts is evidence that they did not already possess them. But what does Paul say?

Instead of telling the Corinthians to seek these gifts

which will soon pass away (1 Cor. 13:8), he urged them to strive after the "higher gifts" of true Christian faith, hope, and above all, love. (1 Cor 12:29-13:3; 14:22) The criterion demanded by Paul, therefore, is not whether one has any or all of these charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, but whether one is free of sin. (1 Cor 11:27-29)

All Witnesses are expected to attend the annual commemoration of the Lord's evening meal, and to bring along as many friends and non-Witnesses as possible; which is one of the reasons why their numbers swell so impressively in their Yearbooks and statistic charts. However, the majority of Jehovah's Witnesses attend the Memorial Supper only as observers.

Of the 9,479,064 Jehovah's Witnesses and friends who attended the 1989 Memorial Supper, only 8,734 regarded themselves as members of Christ's "body" and partook of the "emblematic bread and wine." (Cf. figures in 1990 YEARBOOK, pp. 34-41, and the 1989 Service Year Report from the WATCHTOWER, January 1, 1990, pp. 20-23)

The remaining 9,470,330 observers were those who expected to remain forever on earth. Because of this, they were not entitled to partake of the bread and wine:

According to the invitation that has been extended particularly since the year 1938, all the 'other sheep' come to the precious celebration of the Lord's evening meal. They come, not to partake of the emblematic loaf and wine as the spiritual Israelites do, but as observers of what the small remnant of these do. (LIFE EVERLASTING, p. 156)

Why Jehovah's Witnesses should refer to the Lord's evening meal as a "precious celebration" is never really made clear. It certainly is not evident from the treatment they accord the "emblematic bread and wine." In many congregations it is possible for the bread and wine to be prepared, but no one to partake of it, for it must be remembered that only those who believe themselves to be destined for inclusion among the 144,000 "spirit-begotten" elect are permitted to partake of the bread and wine.

In a congregation composed entirely of earth-bound "other sheep" and "observers," the bread and wine remain untouched. Once the "celebration" is concluded, the bread and wine cease to have any significance and can be taken home by any members of the congregation and consumed as normal food and drink:

Since the emblems in themselves are not sacred, after the celebration is over in the Kingdom Hall and the meeting dismissed, the bread and wine may be taken home and used at some other time as normal food. (WATCHTOWER, March 1, 1969, p. 160)

During the 1970's, the Witnesses were faced with a minor problem of increasing number in the "anointed class." In the Watchtower textbook, **LIFE EVERLASTING**, the writer referred to the way in which the body of the "anointed class" was expected to decrease:

Figures began to be compiled after World War II, and on March 25, 1948, there were 376,393 reported attending the Lord's evening meal, and of

these, only 25,395 partook of the emblematic loaf and wine, to indicate they were of the anointed remnant. However, in the year 1965, at the celebration on Friday night, 1,933,089 attended, but only 11,550 partook. Thus 13,845 of the faithful remnant of the "little flock" passed off the earthly scene in a matter of seventeen years (1948-1965).

It is possible that some baptized Christians were added to the anointed remnant, not to increase the number, but to replace any of them who had proved unfaithful to the heavenly calling and who would therefore leave a vacancy to be filled . . . But despite the bringing in of such ones as replacements, the number of the anointed remnant kept decreasing because more of these died faithful and were taken into the heavenly kingdom than the number of replacements brought in. (**LIFE EVERLASTING**, pp. 148-149)

From 1972, the number of partakers at the Annual Memorial began to increase. In 1972, 10,350 received the bread and wine. The following year, this number increased by 273, and in 1974 a further 200 partakers brought the total to 10,723. In view of the statement that only a "few" have been baptized into the "steadily dwindling remnant of the little flock," (**LIFE EVERLASTING**, p. 150) the increase of numbers of those partaking of the bread and wine must have appeared more than a little perplexing.

No doubt the increase was attributed to an increase in fervor, due, in no small way to the Watchtower's suggestion that 1975 could possibly usher in Armageddon. For immediately

after this date, the numbers again reverted to a "steady dwindling."

Whatever the answer, it is a problem we can safely leave to the Watchtower hierarchy to solve.

I mentioned at the start of this section that the Witnesses' understanding of the Eucharist is basically that of Evangelical Christianity. What this means is that they deny the Catholic doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and regard the bread and wine as nothing more than symbols of his body and blood:

When he [Jesus] said over the blessed bread, 'This is my body,' he wanted his apostles to understand that that loaf meant, represented, or stood for his perfect human body, which was yet to be killed on Calvary. Likewise, when he said over the blessed wine, 'This is my blood,' he wanted them to understand that the wine meant, represented or stood for his blood, which was yet to be literally shed at Calvary. His words were not to be literally applied. (**LIFE EVERLASTING**, p. 129)

The Witnesses' denial of any real presence in the Eucharist touches the very heart of the doctrine as it is held by Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches, and raises the essential question as to what happens to the bread and wine at the words of consecration:

It is claimed that by this ceremony those

apostles were given the power, by their repeating of the words of Jesus, to perform the miracle of transubstantiation, that of changing the substance of the unleavened loaf into Jesus' literal flesh, and the 'product of the wine' in the cup into the literal blood of Jesus. So the Roman Catholic priesthood claim that this is what Jesus Christ himself did when he pronounced the words, 'This is my body,' and 'This is my blood.' This is claimed to be a sacred mystery, so that a person would be presumptuous to doubt and question it. (**LIFE EVERLASTING**, p. 127)

The foregoing quotation highlights the two major issues that call for discussion in this present section: Are Jesus' words over the bread and wine to be taken literally? And, if so, did he delegate this same power to his apostles and their successors?

Both questions are highly controversial, and affect not only Jehovah's Witnesses, but Protestant/Catholic relationships as well. It would have been very easy to have omitted any reference to the Eucharist, or to Purgatory, or to the Virgin Mary in this series of talks, and concentrated instead on the issues I discussed in the companion tapes, but these differences persist in surfacing at the most inopportune times, and if ecumenism is ever to reach fruition, these questions must be constantly re-examined in the light of changing attitudes between the churches, and an ever-increasing knowledge of the Scriptures.

## THE REAL PRESENCE

The Catholic doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist is based on the Scriptural accounts of the Last Supper contained in Matthew 26:26ff; Mark 14:22ff; Luke 22:19ff, and First Corinthians 11:23ff. In Jesus' own words, he gave his body and blood as food and drink under the appearances of bread and wine.

The varying accounts speak of the offering of the bread and wine as "My body **given** for you" (cf. Luke 22:19, and 1 Corinthians 11:24); and the wine as "This cup which is **poured** out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). In this way, Jesus' actions are identified with his approaching sacrifice on the cross.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, and Evangelical Christians, Jesus' words were symbolic. When he said, "This **is** my body," he meant, "This **means** my body." But is this the correct interpretation to give to the Lord's words?

To understand the problem more closely, it may be helpful to look at the Scriptures where the sense of symbolism is more obvious.

In John 10:7, for example, Jesus refers to himself as the "door of the sheep"; and, in John 15:1, he calls himself the "true vine." In what way, then, is Jesus a **door**? Or in what way is he a **vine**?

In these two examples the predicates show that the identification with the subject is not to be taken literally. Of their very nature a door or a vine can be symbolical. Jesus can refer to himself as a door, because it is **through** him that we reach the Father. He can speak of himself as vine, because we who are part of his "body" (that is, the Church), **draw** our

life from him.

But in no way can **bread** be likened to his **flesh**, even symbolically. Jesus himself excluded any suggestion of symbolism by saying:

The bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh . . . for my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. (John 6:51, 55)

As scholars have pointed out, the Aramaic language (the language used by the Jews of the day) which Jesus himself spoke, had no equivalent for the word "is," so Jesus' words over the bread would have been literally: "This body - my."

What Jesus was holding in his hands was bread, but he was identifying it with his own body: "**This**" - the bread he was holding, "my body." In the light of the unequivocal sense of the Aramaic, Jesus' words, as they have come down to us, and in the context in which they appear, seemingly rule out any figurative interpretation. This view is further strengthened when we come to consider other New Testament passages that speak of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

One of the most important of these is undoubtedly contained in the sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, which records Christ's discourse on the Bread of Life theme. The whole passage, from verses 50 - 59, is centered on Christ's promise to give this bread of life to his disciples, and in Catholic theology, this promise was fulfilled at the Last Supper.

Because Protestantism regards these verses as symbolical only, John 6 remains one of the most controversial chapters in the New Testament.

It is significant that Christ's discourse on the bread of life was immediately preceded by two great signs: The feeding of the five thousand, and the walking on the water.

That the two are connected is evident from Mark's comment on the walking on the water: "For they had not understood the incident of the loaves." (Mark 6:52) The apostles had not yet realized the full significance of Jesus' actions; nor could they grasp the fact that he was not bound by the limitations of humankind.

When the crowds came to Jesus the following day they were still thinking of the way he had fed them with the loaves and fishes, but by now Jesus was preparing them for a great new revelation. To turn their thoughts from food that can perish, Jesus began urging them to labor for the bread (that is, doctrine or teaching) that leads to eternal life. (John 6:27)

This metaphorical use of bread was not unfamiliar to the Jews and would have been readily understandable to many in the crowd. Even Jesus' description of himself as the imperishable bread (John 6:27, 35) would not have posed too difficult a problem for them; for as the "way, and the truth, and the life" (cf. John 14:6), his words and actions were spiritual food for his disciples.

It was Jesus' further development of the bread of life theme that turned his listeners against him. He was asking them to believe that he could give himself to them as **real** food.

While these verses **may** still be accorded the figurative meaning Protestantism gives to them, the context demands that they be primarily understood in a literal sense.

Jesus speaks of himself as the "bread from heaven," and that "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life

of the world." (John 6:51) Furthermore, he proclaims that unless one "eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you . . . For my flesh is true food, and my blood if true drink."

Jesus' words contain no ambiguity. Just as the Jews would later understand his claim to divinity and attempt to stone him for blasphemy (cf. John 10:31), so too, here, they understand his words in the literal sense and "as a result of this, many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him." (Jn 6:66)

The acceptance of Jesus' words would have been scarcely less-difficult for the apostles, but instead of deserting him as the others had done, they made a simple profession of faith in saying: "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (Jn 6:68)

Of the other New Testament references to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, one or two from Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians are especially worthy of note.

In First Corinthians 10:14ff, Paul introduces a parallelism between the sacrifices of pagans and Jews, and that of Christians. By eating the sacrifice **of** the altar, the Jews became sharers **in** the altar, and were identified with their sacrifices. (cf. v. 18) By partaking in the sacrifices offered **to** idols (and ultimately offered to demons), pagans became associated **with** the demons (v. 20). By drinking the "cup of the Lord" and partaking in the "table of the Lord," Christians likewise, participate in the blood and the flesh of Jesus (verse 21).

In chapter eleven, Paul warns the Christian that:

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup

of the Lord unworthily, will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord. A person should examine himself, and so eat the bread and drink the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor. 11:27 - 29)

The severity of the language surely argues for belief in something more than a mere symbolic presence of Christ in the Eucharistic meal.

As the Witnesses so cynically point, Catholics admit that the Eucharist is a "great mystery"; but then, so is the Trinity, and the Incarnation, and so is the creation of the world, and the reality of sin and death and resurrection. The fact that a doctrine is beyond our limited comprehension to fully understand, is no reason for condemning it.

It is true that the New Testament does not mention the word "transubstantiation," describing the "essential change" that takes place with the bread and wine at the consecration of the Mass; and that it was not used in its present sense until the Fourth Lateran General Council in 1215 A.D. Nor does the New Testament explain the **manner** in which the bread becomes the body of Christ, but there can be no doubt that this has been the teaching of the Christian Church from the very beginning.

The earliest witnesses to the doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist belong to the immediate post-apostolic era. Some of these witnesses knew the apostles personally; others were instructed by disciples of the apostles

and can therefore speak with certainty on the proper interpretation of New Testament teachings. In a letter to the Christians of Smyrna, Ignatius of Antioch, who died around the year 107 A.D., and to whom we owe the first extant use of the word "Eucharist," wrote concerning a Gnostic sect called the Docetists:

They stay away from the Eucharist and prayer, because they do not admit that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ who suffered for our sins.

Another early Christian apologist, Justin Martyr, who died about the year 165 A.D., writes:

This food is called Eucharist (Thanksgiving) with us . . . the food by which our blood and flesh are nourished through its transformation, and it is, we are taught, the flesh and blood of Jesus who was made flesh. (APOLOGIA, I, 66)

The two instances are not isolated. I have already made mention of other similar Eucharistic quotations from early Christian writers in the second talk of this series, dealing with the **TESTIMONY OF HISTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**. And still further statements are to be found in the writings of most of the early Fathers, such as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Cyprian of Carthage. Origen and Tertullian also add their weight to the accumulated evidence of this ante-Nicene period to show that belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was the common teaching of the Apostolic Church.

## DELEGATION OF POWER TO THE APOSTLES

The writings of the Fathers also help to shed light on the second major issue associated with the Eucharist - the transmission of the power to the apostles and their successors.

Justin Martyr, in the work I just cited, speaks of the bread being brought to the "president of the brethren, and a cup of water and wine: This he takes, and offers praise and glory to the Father of all." Thus, in the Second Century, the Eucharist was celebrated only by the one presiding over the assembly.

That the power to transform the substance of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ was meant to be passed on to the apostles and their successors, is clear from Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

That the Lord Jesus on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' (1 Cor. 11:23-25)

The words, "Do this in remembrance of me" are more than a mere recalling to mind of the events of the Last Supper, for Paul goes on to say: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim (i.e., show forth, declare, or profess) the death of the Lord, until he comes." (cf. 1 Cor.

11:26) This "showing forth, or proclaiming" the death of Jesus has been taken out of the mere recalling to mind stage, and given an altogether deeper significance.

By imitating Christ's actions and words, the apostles and their successors are actually **re-presenting** the saving effects of his redemptive death and applying them to all who participate in the sacrificial rite (cf. 1 Cor. 10:16 - 17)

This passage from First Corinthians also gives rise to the question concerning the frequency of the celebration.

What interpretation are we to give to the word "often?"

- "As **often** as you eat and drink." Jehovah's Witnesses do not hesitate in this matter. The Lord's Evening Meal, or the Memorial, is only to be celebrated annually:

How often is any event of great note memorialized? Is it not yearly? Was not the Passover celebration in commemoration of the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage an annual one, and **that** at the express command of Jehovah God? (WATCHTOWER, April 1, 1963, p. 198)

In the WATCHTOWER for July 1, 1990, the Witnesses give a brief description of the institution of the Memorial Supper, and state:

So this is, in fact, a memorial of Jesus' death. Each year on Nisan 14 it is to be repeated, as Jesus said, in remembrance of him. It will call to the memory of the celebrants what Jesus and his heavenly Father have done to provide escape for humankind from the condemnation of death. For the

Jews who became Christ's followers, the celebration will replace the Passover. (P. 8)

Strictly speaking, there is no argument with the Witnesses on the commemoration of the Memorial, or, Last Supper, as an annual historical event, for this event is celebrated annually almost throughout the whole of Christendom.

But that is bringing to mind, or commemorating something that took place nearly two thousand years ago. And that something was a meal.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate or commemorate Good Friday or Easter Sunday; and yet, the first Memorial Supper itself was held on the eve of the Passover to **anticipate** the drama of the Friday, and ultimately, the all-important event of Easter Day.

So the Memorial Meal does not stand alone. It has no special significance apart from the events which followed. As Paul was later to write to the Corinthians:

If Christ has not been raised, then empty too, is our preaching; empty, too, is your faith.

And a few verses further on, he continues:

For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; and you are still in your sins. (1 Cor. 15:14, 16, 17)

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Easter Day because they were not told to do so. But it is this day which gives

the Memorial Meal and the events of Calvary their meaning.

When the Last Supper, or Memorial, is celebrated today, we are recalling to mind a series of events that transformed the history of the world. And to quote again what Paul wrote in Corinthians:

As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you **proclaim** the death of the Lord until he comes. (1 Cor 11:26)

Paul was writing many years **after the event**, but the **actual** Memorial Meal which Paul was referring to - the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples before he was crucified, was commemorating an event which had not yet taken place. In a special way it was **anticipating** everything that was to take place over the next three days.

Jesus had told his apostles, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"; (Lk 22:15) and in the future, the Christian community was to continue to "do this in remembrance of me." (1 Cor 11:24)

The events of Passover week took place nearly two thousand years ago, and their efficacy and influence were such that they would never need to be repeated. Christ's great sacrifice was offered once for all; for all mankind; for all time. (Cf. Heb 7:27; 9:28; 10:11-12; 1 Pet 3:18)

Catholic theology identifies the Mass with the sacrifice of Christ. It is presented as a renewal of Calvary, applied to us, today.

There are many non-Catholic Christians who know absolutely nothing about the Mass - What it is; what it represents; how it should be approached; how it should be

understood; when it came into existence; and why Catholics attach so much importance to it.

If they have ever heard an attempt to explain what the Mass is, it has probably come from non-Catholic sources that likewise know nothing about what takes place on the altar. And it is this prejudiced outlook that has colored every attempt to understand the meaning of this Catholic form of worship.

What I want to do now is to give a brief explanation of the Mass, and the place it holds in Catholicism.

Firstly, there is no mention in the Gospels of any name given to the Lord's Evening Meal, or Supper. Jesus told his apostles that he had "eagerly desired to eat this **Passover** with you" (Lk 22:15), which was the Jewish feast commemorating the deliverance of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. The word "Passover" never officially attached itself to the Eucharistic celebration.

When Jesus gave the bread to his apostles, he said: "This is my body, which will be given for you; do **this** in memory of me." (Lk 22:19) So "this" - "**this** bread," and "Do **this** in memory" is the only word Jesus used to describe his action.

Very early on, the Eucharistic celebration came to be called by many different names.

In the Acts of the Apostles, it was simply called the "Breaking of Bread" (Acts 2:42, 46), a term which, it can be admitted, did not always designate the Eucharistic celebration.

As I mentioned a little earlier, the word "Eucharist," meaning "thanksgiving," made its first appearance with Ignatius of Antioch, who suffered martyrdom in the year 107 A.D. In his letters to the Christians of Smyrna and Philadelphia, he

uses the word to describe the sacred food and the act of worship itself (Cf. Smyrn. 7:1; Philad. 4). The word was also being used in the **Didache** or Teaching of the Apostles, which is believed to have been written about this same time.

Some writers preferred other names for the act of worship. Some called it simply "The Offering" or "The Sacrifice" but by the end of the Fourth Century, under the influence of Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, the word "Mass" had become commonplace and was in wide-spread use throughout the Western Church.

In the same way, over the centuries, different emphasis has been placed on various aspects of the Mass, so that at times, the **sacrificial** aspect has been emphasized; and at others, the **communal** aspect of the celebration. But this has not **changed** the Mass. Although the **ritual** in which the Mass is clothed may vary greatly from country to country in accordance with local culture and customs, the **structure** remains constant.

There are fixed prayers and fixed readings which always remain the same. The Eucharistic Prayer itself, which was formerly called the **canon** of the Mass because of its unchanging "rule" or character, and on which the Mass is built, has a number of variations.

In Australia, at present, there are four Eucharistic Prayers in common use. There are also other officially approved Prayers for certain occasions, such as Reconciliation, or Penitential rites, and special Children's Masses.

But each of these Eucharistic Prayers has the words of Jesus, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" forming an integral part of the whole. In fact, without these words transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus, there would not be a Mass.

The three **essential** requirements for celebrating a

Mass are an ordained priest; bread and wine, and the words of consecration over the bread and wine: "This is my body" and "This is my blood."

I mentioned a little earlier a number of Scripture texts that refer to the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice. One particular passage from the Letter to the Hebrews reads:

Every priest stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sin. But this one offered **one** sacrifice for sins, and took his seat forever at the right hand of God. (Heb. 10:11-12)

This text from Hebrews raises the question, "How do we reconcile these words that Christ offered **one** sacrifice for sin, with the **countless** sacrifices that are offered daily throughout the world in every Catholic church?"

Even a powerful computer could scarcely begin to estimate the number of Masses that have been offered by literally millions of priests all over the world, every day, for nearly two thousand years.

The answer lies, not in numbers, but in the words of Scripture.

At the Last Supper, or Memorial Meal, Jesus told his apostles to "**do this**," that is, to imitate his words and actions, "in memory of me." (Lk 22:19) The word "this" takes our action today, out of the present, and identifies it with what Christ himself did in the Upper Room at Jerusalem.

The technical term for this action is **anamnesis**, from the Greek, meaning "recalling to mind."

The great **anamnesis** of the Old Testament was the annual Passover celebration which recalled the deliverance of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt. That all-important and decisive event was re-enacted annually - not just to bring the story to mind, but to actualize that historical event and its significance to a people who had not witnessed it for themselves.

They were being identified with the people who had been part of the Exodus people. They were being identified with the People of the Covenant.

Today, we have a New Covenant. At the Last Supper Jesus gave his apostles the cup of "the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor 11:25; also, Lk 22:20), which fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, where God, speaking through the prophet, declared:

The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. (Jer 31:31)

This new covenant not only retains its historical significance, but re-presents it as a perpetual saving act for our time and for all time.

What Jesus did on that night before he died was to prepare for his death the following day. In the presence of his apostles he **anticipated** the events of Calvary, in what Paul described as a "proclamation" of the atoning death. (1 Cor 11:26)

That Jesus' actions were meant to be identified with what was going to happen to him is made perfectly clear when he spoke of the bread as "my body, which will be **given** for you"

and the cup as "the new **covenant** in my blood, which will be **shed** for you." (Lk 22:19-20)

What is happening on the altar is **identical** with what took place on Calvary. The Mass is **one** and the **same** sacrifice as that of Calvary. Christ himself, in the person of his priest, is continually **re-presenting** to the Father, his sacrifice of the Cross. It is one in value, and one in identity. Christ is not suffering and dying over and over again.

If he is present in his body and blood, and he has told us that he is, then so too, he is present in his sacrifice.

Christ is always "living to make intercession for us" (cf. Heb 7:25), and he does this by his eternal sacrifice which was offered once on Calvary for all mankind.

Our concept of time and space may be a severe handicap to us in trying to understand the connection between the altar and Calvary, but God is not bound by our little limitations. Wherever Christ is, so too, is his sacrifice. This difficulty with accepting Christ being present in heaven in his sacrifice, and present on the altar at the same time, may not be easy to come to terms with. But it is no less difficult in accepting that Christ is also present in so many particles of bread. And this is what the apostle Paul is laboring so hard to impress upon us. He writes:

Judge for yourselves what I am saying. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the bread is one, we though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. (1 Cor 10:15-17)

In the Eucharistic celebration, the Mass, all the essential elements of sacrifice are there. There is no longer any **physical** shedding of blood, as this was done once and for all on Calvary. But there is a separation of the bread and wine under the separate consecrations during the Mass, and this action "proclaims the death of the Lord until he comes." (1 Cor 11:26)

It also fulfills another prophecy I spoke about in an earlier talk on the **TESTIMONY OF HISTORY FOR THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**, and that is, the prophecy of Malachi, where the last of the Old Testament prophets, speaking in the name of God, looks forward to a time when all the nations will offer a more-pleasing sacrifice than that of the ancient Israelites:

Oh, that one among you would shut the temple gates to keep you from kindling fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts. Neither will I accept any sacrifice from your hands. For from the rising of the sun, even to its setting, my name is great among the nations. And everywhere they bring sacrifice to my name, and a pure offering. For my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal 1:10-11)

This particular text has had a long and, since the Reformation, controversial history. And it is not hard to see why, for the mention of "pure offerings" to be offered by the nations in the years to come, is seen by the Church as referring to the sacrifice of the Mass.

At the 22nd Session of the General Council of Trent, held in September of 1562, the Council Fathers proclaimed the

Catholic doctrine concerning the Sacrifice of the Mass:

So that the ancient, complete, and in every way perfect faith and teaching regarding the great mystery of the Eucharist in the Catholic Church may be retained, and with the removal of errors and heresies may be preserved in its purity, the holy, ecumenical, and general Council of Trent, instructed by the light of the Holy Spirit, teaches, declares, and orders to be preached to the faithful, the following concerning it, since it is the true and only sacrifice.

The Council Fathers went on to speak of the perfect priesthood of Christ in contrast to the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament; of the perfect sacrifice of Christ on Calvary; and of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The document goes on to say that Jesus:

. . . instituted a new Passover, namely himself, to be immolated under visible signs by the Church through its priests in memory of his own passage from this world to the Father, when, by the shedding of his blood he redeemed and delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into his kingdom. And this is indeed that clean oblation which cannot be defiled by any unworthiness or malice on the part of those who offer it; which the Lord foretold by Malachi was to be great among the Gentiles, and which the apostle Paul has clearly indicated when he says that they who are defiled by partaking of the table of demons, cannot be partakers of the table of the

Lord, understanding by table, in each case, the altar. It is, finally, that sacrifice which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices during the period of nature and of the Law, which, namely, comprises all the good things signified by them, as being the consummation and perfection of them all.

As to the frequency of the offering, the Watchtower's teaching that it can be commemorated only once a year and that this was always the practice in the early Church is simply not true.

The Watchtower's almost total rejection of the witness of the early Church to the apostolic teaching should preclude it from any right to speak on what the early Church believed and practiced.

In spite of the Witnesses' statements that the early Church commemorated the Eucharistic celebration only once a year, it can be shown from the writings of the Fathers from Ignatius of Antioch onwards, that they all had something to say on the frequency of the celebration; and in the majority of cases, mention is made of the celebration taking place weekly. As Tertullian sums it up:

'Give us this day our daily bread' should be understood in a spiritual sense. Christ is our bread because Christ is our life, and bread is life. 'I am the bread of life,' he says. And just as this bread is spoken of as 'real food,' we can argue that in order to be properly nourished, we need to be fed more often than once a year.

Elsewhere, Tertullian also writes: "We take the sacrament of the Eucharist . . . in meetings before daybreak." And, more specifically, Justin Martyr writes: "On Sunday we meet to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and we read the Gospels and Sacred Scriptures - the first day on which God changed darkness, and made the world, and on which Christ rose from the dead." (Cf. Justin, **FIRST APOLOGY**, 67)

Until recently, it could be said that Jehovah's Witnesses, who are outside the mainstream of Christianity, had more in common with Protestant theology than Catholics, but in recent years the climate of fellowship between the Christian churches has resulted in meaningful dialogue on the Eucharist, and though the sacrament of unity (cf. 1 Cor 10:17) is still one of division, the signs are that this is slowly changing.

This section of the talk has only briefly touched upon aspects of the Eucharist that highlight the differences of opinion that center around an ordinance, that, for Catholics, is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Church.

More could have been said, and much more will need to be said, before these differences are resolved and Catholics sit in fellowship around a common Eucharistic table.

End of Section Two

## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE VIRGIN MARY

Jehovah's Witnesses have reacted sharply to the alleged excesses of Marian devotion in Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite churches, and to a lesser extent in certain Protestant churches, by toning down Mary's role in the "Plan of Salvation," almost to the point of degrading her.

In Watchtower theology, Mary "just happened" to be the woman God chose to be the mother of his Son; and once she had given birth to Jesus, her special role was finished, she no longer had any part to play, and she was at liberty to have other children and care for them along with her "first born."

No special significance has been attached to any of the events in Mary's life, and a number of the incidents have actually been re-interpreted to further minimize her dignity and importance.

The Watchtower book, **INSIGHT ON THE SCRIPTURES**, describes Mary as possessing "fitting modesty and humility" (**INSIGHT**, p. 346), and on the following page there is mention of Mary's "sensitive and humble nature."

But in their efforts to counter the effects of Catholic devotion to Mary, the Witnesses go to the opposite extreme, and there are many indications that they have difficulty in permitting any honor to be given to her at all.

Some 25 years ago, the Watchtower published a small handbook, called: **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**. This was a forerunner to the more-recent **REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, and it provided a good example of the Witnesses' attempts to draw attention away from Mary. Between pages 329 and 331, thirty Scriptural texts under a **dozen** different headings, offered

nothing but disparagement to Mary, and were unworthy of Christians who professed to be followers of her Son.

According to Jehovah's Witnesses there can be no legitimate study of Mary's role in the "Plan of Salvation" (that is, **Mariology**), for all such study is grouped in the handbook under the heading **MARIOLATRY**, which is the idolatrous worship of Mary.

Even the later **REASONING BOOK**, which was published in 1985, seeks to clothe its anti-Christian bias behind a cloak of conciliation and scholarship, but it, too, fails to disguise its hostility and opposition to any form of Mariology.

The same can be said for some of the more militant Protestant churches, which look with suspicion on Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite attitudes to Mary, and are wary of any attempts to clarify the position so as to make it more acceptable to them.

Lorraine Boettner, whom I have continued to quote throughout this series of talks as representative of modern-day Christian Fundamentalism, devotes a whole chapter to Mary in his book **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, and sums up his own attitude to Catholic devotion to Mary by writing:

Wherever the eyes of the Church are directed to the abundance of grace, there is no mention of Mary. Surely this silence is a rebuke to those who would build a system of salvation around her. God has given us all the record we need concerning Mary, and that record does not indicate that worship or veneration in any form is to be given to her. How complete, then, is the falsehood of Romanism that gives primary worship and devotion to her. (**ROMAN**

CATHOLICISM, p. 133)

Admittedly, this statement is not representative of Protestantism in general, for many Protestants have a deep and sincere devotion to Mary; but there are some who are afraid to give any honor to Mary for fear that they may be detracting from her Son, or that they might be straying too far down the path towards the errors of Catholicism.

So once again we enter the field of controversy. And once again we see the many obstacles that still stand in the way of Christian unity.

I don't enjoy controversy for controversy's sake, for as I have said on another occasion, I could wish that I did not have to be embroiled in these issues at all.

This section of the talk, dealing with the Virgin Mary, does not sidestep the controversy surrounding the Protestant/Catholic attitudes to Mary, but brings them into focus and examines them in the light of the Scriptures and history.

It will be admitted that in the space of thirty or forty minutes it is not possible to deal with all twelve of the Witnesses' objections to Mariology, and for this reason I have selected three of the more common questions that pose the greatest problems, not only to the Witnesses, but also to those Christians who have difficulty in reconciling Marian devotion with a Christ-centered religion.

The three questions I have chosen deal with the Immaculate Conception of Mary; Mary as the Mother of God; and the Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

Question One. "Jesus' Mother Mary Not 'Immaculate' or Freed From Inherited Sin."

These words are a quote from the sub-heading in the Watchtower's questions and answers handbook **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, p. 329.

The Witnesses open their attack of the Virgin Mary by denying that she was in any way exempted from the sin of Adam. Under the heading I quoted, the handbook refers the reader to two texts to show that the Mother of Christ, like all the human family, was conceived in sin:

Rom 5:12, Douai: 'By one man sin entered into this world, and by sin, death; and so death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned.'

Rom 3:9, 10, Douai: 'What then? Do we excel them? No, not so. For we have charged both Jews and Greeks, that they are all under sin. As it is written: There is not any man just.'

The 1985 **REASONING BOOK**, also uses the text from Romans 5 to deny the Immaculate Conception, and asks: "Does that include the Virgin Mary? The Bible reports that in accord with the requirement of the Mosaic Law, 40 days after Jesus' birth, Mary offered at the temple in Jerusalem a sin offering for purification from uncleanness. She, too, had inherited sin and imperfection from Adam." (**REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 258)

Now to start from the beginning, the first point to make clear is that the "Immaculate Conception" refers to Mary

herself, and has nothing to do with the Virgin Birth, or the way in which Christ himself was conceived - insofar as we are talking biologically.

There was nothing miraculous about the birth of Mary, or anything abnormal in her physical origin. She was conceived and born of a human father and a human mother in the normal manner as is the rest of humankind.

The second point is a reminder that Mary's Immaculate Conception cannot be understood apart from the Church's teaching on Original Sin.

When Catholics speak of "original sin," they are referring to Adam's sin in Eden and its consequences. Some Christians may prefer to call it by other names, but in the end, it all means the same.

Jehovah's Witnesses speak of the sin of Adam, and though they do not refer to it as the "first" or "original" sin, the inference is clear. In the **REASONING BOOK**, under the heading of "Suffering," the Witnesses seek to answer the age-old question of suffering, and point out that Adam and Eve were to have transmitted perfect human life to their descendants, but their sin put an end to this:

It was as sinners that Adam and Eve produced children, and they could not pass on to their children what they no longer had. All were born in sin, with inclinations towards wrongdoing, weaknesses that could lead to illness, a sinful inheritance that would eventually result in death. Because everyone on earth today was born in sin, all of us experience suffering in various ways. (**REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 394)

This sin of Adam and Eve which still affects us today, is what Catholics call Original Sin - the "original" or "first" sin that was committed by Adam and passed on to all humankind. Everyone born since the time of Adam is in a situation of inward alienation from God. As the Watchtower put it in the passage from the **REASONING BOOK**, We are born with "inclinations toward wrongdoing."

It was because of this sin of Adam, this original sin, that Jesus came into the world to redeem, or, as Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to describe it, to "**ransom**" humankind.

Because all had sinned and had fallen short of the perfection sought by God, a remedy was needed. And this remedy was what the Witnesses refer to as the "Ransom sacrifice of Christ our Lord."

The whole situation resulting from the sin of Adam is explained by Paul in his letter to the Romans, chapter 5, verses 12 through 21.

It is these words of Paul that cause Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses so much difficulty in accepting anything remotely suggesting that Mary might have been exempted from this sin of Adam.

In Romans 5:12, which I quoted a few moments ago from the Watchtower handbook, **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, Paul wrote that "**all** have sinned," that is, the **WHOLE** human race, and according to the Witnesses, that includes Mary.

Perhaps the best way to explain the Catholic teaching is to use the words of Pope Pius IX, who defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in his Encyclical Letter, **INEFFABILIS DEUS**. On December 8, 1854, the doctrine was raised to an article of faith, to be accepted as a revealed truth by Almighty God, and to be believed by all Catholics. The document

reads, in part:

To the glory of the holy and undivided Trinity, to the honor and ornament of the Virgin Mother of God, and the exaltation of the Catholic faith, and the increase of the Christian religion, We, by the authority of our Lord, Jesus Christ, of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which holds that the Most Blessed Virgin Mary from the first moment of her conception was, by the singular grace and privilege of Almighty God, in view of the merits of Christ Jesus the Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin, is revealed by God and is therefore firmly and constantly to be believed by all the faithful.

This doctrine, which teaches that Mary was conceived and born free from the inherited sin of Adam does not find unanimous acceptance within the Christian Church. Since 1854, when it was finally promulgated by Pope Pius IX, the Immaculate Conception has been an article of faith of the Catholic Church, and though it has its advocates among certain theologians of other Christian denominations, for the most part it remains a doctrine exclusively Catholic in character, and it is usually treated as such by the majority of Protestants.

What we need to understand is that Catholicism does not teach that Mary had no need of redemption. In Luke 1:47, she, herself, speaks of "God my Savior," a phrase that would be meaningless if she did not need to be redeemed. The texts quoted in the Watchtower handbooks apply no less to Mary than

any other descendant of Adam; but in this case, there is a difference in the application of the redemptive grace of Christ.

The Church's definition of the doctrine spoke of the "singular grace and privilege of Almighty God," and, that Mary was "preserved immune from all stain of original sin."

There was a time, in the Middle Ages, when theologians wrestled with the problem of an Immaculate Conception. From the early Fifth Century, when the Council of Ephesus had declared it legitimate to speak of Mary as the Mother of God, the teaching of her Immaculate Conception had also started to grow.

One of the great champions of Marian theology, Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 - 1153), objected to the institution of a feast day in honor of the Immaculate Conception in Lyons, around the year 1140 A.D., and taught that Mary was sanctified only **after** her conception, when she was already in her mother's womb.

The reasoning behind this line of argument was that for Mary to be truly redeemed there must have been a moment, however brief, when she was under the empire of sin.

This **post**-conception privilege finds a more-ready acceptance among Protestant theologians, who can relate to the Gospel account of John the Baptist's sanctification in **his** mother's womb (cf. Luke 1:44). But the Catholic Church is insistent that this is not how Mary's privilege is to be understood.

Bernard of Clairvaux, and other theologians who had difficulty in reconciling Mary's sanctification from the first moment of her conception, did not have the infallible assurance of the Church that this was the way the doctrine was to be accepted. Another seven hundred years would elapse before all doubts would be laid to rest.

But less than two hundred years after Bernard, another

great scholar, the Franciscian, Duns Scotus, who died in 1308 A.D., offered a solution to this impasse by proposing that Mary's Immaculate Conception was an **anticipated** redemption. Through the introduction of the concept of pre-redemption for Mary, the way was open to reconcile her freedom from original sin with Paul's declaration that "all have sinned" and are in need of redemption. This correct approach to the resolution of the dilemma enabled later scholars to answer the many questions that still needed to be resolved.

Because of sin we all fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), but this was not the will of the Father. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul spoke of God's Plan of Salvation, and he wrote: "He chose **us** in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him." (Eph 1:4)

Paul's words apply in a special way to Mary. The original sin of Adam deprived his descendants of the indwelling grace of God, and we lost an intimacy with our Creator, a friendship which should have been transmitted to us by our first parents. But in Mary's case, this friendship was never lost. Just as God chose **us** before the foundation of the world to be holy and without blemish before him; so too, he chose Mary, before the foundation of the world to be the mother of his Son. If the Father wanted **us** to be "without blemish," how much more so, the mother of his Son?

Mary's redemption was no less real than our own. In fact, although she may not have known it, she was even more indebted to her Redeemer than we are, because the merits of her Son and Savior had **preserved** her from ever incurring the sin of our race. She was redeemed in the most perfect way possible - from the time she was conceived - from the very first

moment of her conception.

When Pope Pius IX proclaimed the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception to be an article of faith in the Papal Bull **INEFFABILIS DEUS**, he quoted from such Scriptural texts as Genesis 3:15, which refers to the condemnation of the serpent which had seduced Adam and Eve:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and hers; He will strike  
at your head, while you strike at his heel.

There is no suggestion here that Pope Pius IX was dogmatically affirming that this was the only correct interpretation of the text, for the infallibility of the Papal decree covered the dogma only, and not the reasons that lead up to it.

Jehovah's Witnesses, on the other hand, give a highly symbolical, and erroneous interpretation to Genesis 3:15, and attempt to identify the "woman" with John's vision of the Woman of the Apocalypse, as referred to in Revelation 12:1ff; and I quote from one of their publications:

Some factors in the circumstances existing at the time of the prophetic promise provide clues as to the 'woman's' identity. Since her seed was to crush the serpent's head, he would have to be more than a human seed, for the Scriptures show that it was not a literal snake on the ground that God's words were aimed. The 'serpent' is shown at Revelation 12:9 to be Satan the Devil, a spirit person. Consequently, the 'woman' of the prophecy could not

be a human woman, such as Mary the mother of Jesus

It would follow logically and in harmony with the Scriptures that the 'woman' of Genesis 3:15 would be a spiritual 'woman'. And corresponding to the fact that the 'bride' or 'wife' of Christ is not an individual woman, but a composite one, made of many spiritual members (Rev 21:9), the 'woman' who brings forth God's spiritual sons, God's 'wife' (prophetically foretold in the words of Isaiah and Jeremiah as cited in the foregoing), would be made up of many spiritual persons. It would be a composite body of persons, an organization, a heavenly one. (AID TO BIBLE UNDERSTANDING, p. 1666)

One will search in vain for any Scriptural reference to justify the Witnesses' interpretation of a composite body of spiritual believers who will crush the head of the serpent - that is, break the devil's power. This is an action that belongs solely to Jesus (Jn 16:33; 2 Cor 2:14; Rev 17:14; 19:11-21). Jesus is the "seed" who crushed the serpent's head, and whose "heel was bruised" in turn, by the serpent - a description which is a possible reference to the **apparent** defeat on the cross.

Since Jesus is the true "seed" who was to crush the serpent's head, the "woman" of the prophecy can, in a sense, be seen as Mary, and this was the interpretation by a number of the Fathers of the early Church, among them Irenaeus, Epiphanius, Isidor, Cyprian, and Leo the Great.

In their view, Mary was the "new Eve," and the enmity spoken of as being placed between the woman and the serpent

was seen as precluding her from ever being under the influence or domination of Satan, as she would have been if she was subject to the inherited sin of Adam.

As Augustine was later to write, concerning the consequences of Adam's Fall, and the entry of sin into the world, everyone must regard themselves as sinners, "except the Holy Virgin Mary, whom I desire, for the sake of the honor of the Lord, to leave entirely out of the question, when the talk is of sin." (THE NATURE OF GRACE, 36, 42)

Augustine is speaking here of personal sins, but still more than three hundred years before the promulgation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, the Council of Trent dealt with the question of Original Sin, and stated dogmatically:

If any one shall say that a man once justified . . . can avoid throughout his life even venial sins, except by a special privilege from God, such as the Church holds concerning the Blessed Virgin, let them be anathema.

And further on, the same document states again that it was **not** its intention to "involve Mary, the Blessed and Immaculate Virgin and Mother of God in this decree."

The angel Gabriel greeted Mary as "Full of Grace," or "Favored One." God's favor rested on her in a special manner, and in Catholic theology this text from Luke 1:28, has been the subject of extended study, so that much more can be drawn from it to show a characteristic quality of Mary, that is unique, to her alone.

In 1943, Pope Pius XII put out an Encyclical Letter, called **THE MYSTICAL BODY OF CHRIST**, and referred to all those who belong to Christ, living or dead, or those not yet born, as being part of the body of Christ (cf. Eph 1:22-23; 5:30; and Col 1:18).

In the letter, the pope, speaking of Mary, wrote: "Her most holy soul, more than the souls of all others of God's creatures, was filled with the Divine Spirit of Jesus Christ."

This was how Christ **wanted** his mother to be holy - filled with divine "grace" or "favor" from the time she was conceived.

Mary's special privilege is also seen in another passage where Elizabeth says to her, "Most **blessed** are you among women, and **blessed** is the fruit of your womb." (Lk 1:42) The blessing that rests on Mary is paralleled with that of her Son in his humanity. If Mary's blessing is to be equated with the blessing of Jesus, then she, too, has been given a unique favor which has been given to no one else.

The Immaculate Conception should therefore be understood as an undeserved gift of God, bestowed on Mary in virtue of her foreknown free act of consent (Lk 1:38), and applied to her in **anticipation** of the saving merits of her Son's redeeming death.

Question Two.

"Mary Was Not 'Mother of God,' Since  
Jesus Was Not God, but the Son of God."  
(**MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, p. 330)

The most important issue raised by Jehovah's Witnesses' objections to Mariology refers to Mary's right to be called the Mother of God. It is most important, for it concerns the cornerstone of the Christian faith - the deity of Jesus Christ.

Those who deny Mary the right to be called the Mother of God are usually those who deny that Jesus is God, or, those who have an imperfect knowledge of what the deity of Christ really involves. But even among professing Christians, the doctrine still encounters opposition from those who are afraid to give Mary this title because of ingrained fears that they may be detracting some of the honor due only to God.

Because of the Witnesses' anti-trinitarian bias, their understanding of this teaching is not unexpected. Jesus is not God, so Mary cannot be the Mother of God:

However, according to Trinity teachers, when "the word became flesh," Mary became the mother of God. But since they say God is a Trinity, then the Jewish virgin Mary became the mother of merely a third of God, not 'the mother of God.' She became the mother of only one Person of God, the Person that is put second in the formula 'God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost.' So Mary was merely

the mother of 'God the Son'; she was not the mother of 'God the Father,' neither the mother of 'God the Holy Ghost.' (THE WORD - WHO IS HE? ACCORDING TO JOHN, pp. 12, 13)

It is not my intention, here, to go into a detailed description of the Witnesses' understanding of the Trinity, and their erroneous views on a three-part God, as I have already discussed it at length in my book, **THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES**.

What I would like to do now is to give a concise explanation of the way in which Mary is seen to be the Mother of God.

Firstly, no orthodox Christian would deny that Jesus is God, but many are reluctant to call Mary the "Mother of God," for they fear that the title tends to elevate her to the level of deity. However, a glance at the historical development of Mary's title reveals that the original objection to her being called the Mother of God was occasioned by a denial of the true deity of her Son.

As early as the Second Century A.D., Christian writers were speaking of the Virgin Mary as the "Mother of God," and there was never any serious objection to the title until about 428 A.D., when Nestorius, who had succeeded Sisinnius as Bishop of Constantinople, began teaching that Mary should not be called "Mother of God" (**Theotokos**), but "Mother of Christ" (**Christotokos**)

I need to point out here that the Nestorian attack was not so much directed at Mary, as against the deity of her Son.

It was just over one hundred years since the Council

of Nicaea had dispelled the Arian heresy and defined the Church's belief in the deity of Christ. During that time a number of questions that remained unanswered at Nicaea had moved to the fore-front in theological discussions, and in some areas, were the subject of fierce theological controversy.

One such dispute revolved around the dual natures in Christ, and it was in the understanding of this mysterious union of the divine and human natures in Christ that Nestorius fell into error.

A presbyter named Anastasius, whom Nestorius had brought from Antioch, preached one day in a church and said, "Let no one call Mary 'Theotokos,' for Mary was but a human being, and it is impossible that God should be born of a human being."

There was an immediate uproar, for the people had been taught to acknowledge Christ as God, and by no means to separate his humanity from his divinity.

The dispute was brought before the bishop, and according to the contemporary accounts of Socrates, Nestorius sought to avoid having a charge of blasphemy raised against Anastasius by siding with him, and defending the statements he had made by totally rejecting the use of the term "Theotokos."

The erroneous views of Anastasius and Nestorius were immediately challenged by the clergy of Constantinople and the neighboring Sees, and the patriarch found a strong opponent in Cyril of Alexandria, who quickly rose to the defense of the true faith.

Not unlike Apollinarius, some seventy years earlier, Nestorius fell into error over the dual natures in Christ. Apollinarius, a Bishop of Laodicea, about 360 A.D., taught that the Second Person of the Trinity, the **Logos**, took the place

of the spiritual part of Jesus' soul, with the result that Christ's humanity was incomplete.

The errors of Apollinarius were explicitly condemned at the Second General Council held at Constantinople in 381 A.D.

Nestorius, on the other hand, denied that the eternal **Logos** himself was the real and only personal subject of Christ's humanity. He taught that there were two separate Persons in the Incarnate Christ, one divine and one human, as opposed to the orthodox doctrine that the Incarnate Christ was a single Person, at once God and Man. And it was this error in relation to the Incarnate Christ that led Nestorius to reject the use of the term "Theotokos."

Once the dispute moved into the open, events moved rather swiftly, culminating in a General Council, which was held at Ephesus, in 431 A.D. Nestorius was deposed, his teachings condemned, and the divine motherhood of Mary was proclaimed as an article of faith.

The actual words used in the Council's definition of Mary's unique status, leave no room for ambiguity:

If anyone does not confess that Emmanuel is truly God, and the Blessed Virgin therefore Mother of God because she bore according to the flesh the Incarnate Word from God, Let him be anathema.

A point that is most important to realize here is that what was at stake at Ephesus was the truth about our Lord, much more than a truth about Mary. Mary's title of **Theotokos** rightfully belongs to her, solely because of the nature and Person of her Son. The two cannot be divided. And to this

day, no one who seriously and firmly believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God can deny that the Virgin Mary is truly Mother of God.

Christians today, who do not accept **Theotokos**, would do well to examine their position a little more closely.

Lorraine Boettner, in his book, **ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, repeats this same error when he writes:

When we say that a woman is the mother of a person we mean that she gave birth to that person. But Mary certainly did not give birth to God, nor to Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God. She was not the mother of the Lord's divinity, but only of his humanity. Instead, Christ the second person of the Trinity, has existed from all eternity, and was Mary's Creator. Hence the term as used in the present day Roman Church must be rejected. (**ROMAN CATHOLICISM**, p. 134)

One gets the distinct impression from what Dr. Boettner is saying, that he rejects the doctrine of **Theotokos** solely because the "Roman" Church has pronounced on it. However, whether this is reading more or less into what he is saying, Dr. Boettner still strays dangerously close to the boundaries of orthodoxy when he seeks to divide the humanity and divinity of Christ.

At the Fourth General Council, held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D., the dogmatic letter, which we now know as the "Tome of Leo," (that is Pope Leo I), was read to the Council Fathers, and became accepted as the classic statement of Catholic doctrine on the Incarnation - so much so, that the Fathers declared that

"Peter has spoken through Leo."

The following quote is from Paragraph 5 of the Tome:

By reason, then, of this unity of Person to be understood in both natures, the Son of Man is said to have come down from heaven when the Son of God took flesh from the Virgin from whom he was born; and again, the Son of God is said to have been crucified and buried, though he suffered these things not in the Godhead itself, wherein the Only-Begotten is co-eternal and consubstantial with the Father, but in the weakness of His human nature. Accordingly we all confess in the creed that the Only-begotten Son of God was crucified and buried in accord with what the Apostle says, 'If they had known, they never would have crucified the Lord of Majesty.' (1 Cor 2:8)

What Leo is saying is that the divine and human natures in Christ are so inextricably united in the **PERSON** of Christ, that it is not incorrect to speak of **GOD** being crucified and buried.

This may not be the way **we** might speak **today**, for we have a tendency to be very precise in our terminology. But the writers and Fathers of the **very** early Church did not hesitate or scruple to speak of God being born; of God suffering, or being crucified; or of God dying.

There is a difficulty of course, that the use of unguarded language can lead the theologically untrained person into all kinds of heretical snares, and for this reason one must guard against wrong impressions being formed from imprecise

expressions.

Only with great care and subtlety can one speak of God being born, or of God suffering and dying, and no one wishes to be accused of being less than accurate in their choice of words or turn of phrase.

In this same way, Mary could quite legitimately be called the "Mother of God." The popular usage of the term did not in any way lessen the reality of the expression; and when the use of the term **Theotokos** was challenged by Nestorius, the Church, as the visible, teaching authority of Christ on earth, wasted no time in convening a General Council at Ephesus in 431 A.D., and after deliberating the question and seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit, promulgated the truth of the doctrine for all time.

Henceforth, Mary could properly be called the Mother of God in the fullest sense. From the time of Ephesus, now almost sixteen hundred years ago, this has been the teaching and the faith of the Christian Church; and to deny the validity of **Theotokos** puts one at variance with the teaching authority of the Church.

It must be clearly understood that Ephesus never taught, nor has it ever been taught, that **Theotokos** implies that Mary outranks, or is equal to God; or that she in any way existed before God, or gave to God anything of his essential nature that he did not already possess. Mary remains a creature of God and derives her very existence from him. All that she has, and all that she is comes from him who is the source of all.

Mary is the Mother of God, because her Son Jesus Christ is God. She is the mother not only of Christ's human nature

- if human natures have mothers, but the mother of the **person** of Christ.

In any discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses, the defense of Mary's title is seen to be rather pointless, for they reject the foundation that gives the title its meaning - the Deity of Christ. However, if we are to obtain a balanced picture of the authentic, historical Christian faith, then Mary's role in the Plan of Salvation and the special dignity bestowed on her by Almighty God, must be examined in the light of the revealed knowledge we have of her Son: For Mary's title, solemnly conferred on her at Ephesus, is no less than a confession of faith in the Incarnation of the Son of God.

Question Three.

Mary Not 'Ever Virgin'; She Bore Other Children After Jesus. (**MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, p. 330)

One of the most common anti-Marian objections raised by Jehovah's Witnesses is the charge that the Mother of Christ did not maintain her virginity after the birth of Jesus, but went on to have other children in the normal way.

The Watchtower's Bible handbook, **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, quotes Matthew 1:24-25, and Matthew 13:55-56, in support of the view that Jesus was but one of the children of a large

family.

Although not as controversial as the doctrines of the Immaculate Conception or the teaching of Mary as the Mother of God, belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary is still regarded as a doctrine that belongs exclusively to Catholicism. And because of this, few Protestants are prepared to defend the teaching against the frequent attacks of the Witnesses.

I hope to show in this brief discussion that the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is firmly grounded in the Scriptures and history, and that it calls for a definite stand on the part of all professing Christians.

The Catholic Church has proclaimed four great truths about Mary, and has done so in the solemn manner of defining them as articles of faith. Firstly, that Mary is **Theotokos**, or Mother of God; Secondly, that she was conceived free from Original Sin (i.e., her Immaculate Conception); Thirdly, that she remained forever a virgin; and, Fourthly, the teaching of the Assumption - that Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory.

I have already spoken of the first two doctrines in this section on Mary, but unfortunately I have had to omit any reference to Mary's Assumption at this time. However, the third doctrine in the above list does call for some comment here, and I would like to take the time to sketch through its history, and show the significance of the teaching in Christian thought.

A study of Mary's virginity in Scripture involves two separate questions; related, but distinct. The first concerns the evidence for Mary's perpetual virginity, and once that has been established, there is the further problem of determining the precise relationship between Jesus and his "brethren."

Part A of the Question: The Perpetual Virginity of Mary.

Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 1:18 informs us that Mary was espoused to a man named Joseph, "but before they lived together she was found with child through the Holy Spirit."

Before they "came together" or "lived together" **can** refer to sexual knowledge, but here it clearly refers to the period between the espousals and the actual co-habitation. Although Mary was the legal spouse of Joseph, it appears it was customary for a Jewish couple to observe the law of continency until they took up formal residence about a year later.

It was during this period that the "annunciation" of the angel Gabriel took place, and though Mary's reply, "How will this be, since I know not a man" (Lk 1:34 - literal translation), may refer only to the immediate present, it can also be elliptical, and in Semitic usage, it can be understood as implying a desire of remaining a virgin, in which case the **sense** would be, "Since I do not wish to have knowledge of man." I will return to this verse a little later.

Jehovah's Witnesses, in their 1985 **REASONING BOOK**, stress the importance of maintaining that Jesus was born of a virgin mother (p. 255). And evangelical Protestants and Fundamentalists even go so far as to make acceptance of the Virgin Birth of Jesus one of the criterion for measuring a person's orthodoxy.

The late Walter Martin, in his book **THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS**, wrote:

One of the great doctrines of the Bible, which is uniquely related to the supreme earthly manifestation of the Eternal God, is the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. In one very real sense, this doctrine is indissolubly linked with that of the Incarnation, being, so to speak, the agency of instrument whereby God chose to manifest himself. (KINGDOM OF THE CULTS, 1st ed., p. 185)

The importance of the Virgin Birth to the Fundamentalist Christian can be seen in the remark the editors make in the introduction to the **NEW SCOFIELD REFERENCE BIBLE**, which is **the** Bible version for Fundamentalists:

This is an appropriate place to assure the reader that, in common with Dr. Scofield and his associates in the original work, every member of the committee of revision believes in and teaches the plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures; the Triune Godhead composed of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the Virgin Birth and Deity of Christ.

So there are many who will fiercely defend the teaching that Jesus was born to a virgin, but very few will maintain that Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. In fact, the majority of Protestants, Evangelical or Fundamentalist, are adamant that Mary did not remain a virgin after Jesus was born and, along with Jehovah's Witnesses, they cite Scriptures to show that Mary did have other children.

In contrast to this attitude, the Catholic Church

maintains that Mary was a virgin, before, during, and after the birth of Jesus. Belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary has even been made an article of faith.

The question is, Why the difference?

Why is there so much emphasis put on the actual virgin birth of Jesus, and so little concern for the virginal state of Mary **after** the birth of Jesus?

The question is not new. There had been discussions on the virginity of Mary almost from the earliest years, but seldom had it been denied.

The apostolic Church was aware that Jesus had been born to a virgin: "The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a town of Galilee called Nazareth, to a **virgin** betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary." (Lk 1:26, 27)

There was unanimous consent among the Fathers that the passage from Luke's Gospel was to be understood in such a way that there could be no doubt that Mary had conceived her child while she was still a virgin. The angel's words to Joseph: "Do not be afraid to take Mary your wife into your home. For it is through the Holy Spirit that this child has been conceived in her," (Mt 1:20) were accepted without question by the early Church, and all the writers of this period speak of Jesus as "truly born of a virgin."

Thus far, today, among professing Christians, there is no disagreement with what I have said. But this is a three-part statement. Mary was a virgin before, **during** and **after** the birth of Jesus, and it is with the second and third part of the statement that the differences of opinion begin to emerge.

That Mary remained a virgin during the birth of Jesus **as well** as afterwards, can be inferred from the title Mary "**EVER-**

**VIRGIN**" which was bestowed on her at the Fifth General Council of Constantinople, in the year 553.

A few years before that, the teaching that Mary maintained her virginity during the birth of Jesus, was attested in the dogmatic letter of Pope Leo I, the famous **TOME** of Leo, which the pope wrote to Flavian, the Bishop of Constantinople, on June 13, 449 A.D.

The letter was given formal authority by the Council of Chalcedon, in 451 A.D., when the assembled bishops, after hearing the letter read in council, exclaimed, "Peter has spoken through Leo."

The Tome is regarded as the classic statement on the Incarnation, and the doctrine that Mary maintained her virginity during the birth of Jesus is expressly taught in paragraph two of the document. Speaking of Jesus, Leo wrote:

For he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the Virgin Mother, who brought him forth without loss of virginity, even as she conceived him without loss of virginity.

That Mary remained a virgin **after** the birth of Jesus, found very few objections in the early Church. The African Church Father, Tertullian, who was born in the early second half of the Third Century, and whom I have quoted on many occasions in this series of talks, was one of the few voices raised against the perpetual virginity of Mary.

Eunomius, Helvidius, Jovinian, and Bonosus, were among the others who objected to the teaching, but for the most part, their names are better known to us today as opponents of orthodoxy, and their objections have been well answered by their

contemporaries.

Jehovah's Witnesses draw on Helvidius in a quote from the **NEW CATHOLIC ENCYCLOPEDIA**, to add weight to their denial of the perpetual virginity of Mary; but they go on to admit in the rest of the quote that he found a strong opponent in Jerome, the 4th Century translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible (cf. **REASONING FROM THE SCRIPTURES**, p. 256).

Jovinian met his match in Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan; and Bonosus received his answer in the following letter of Pope Siricius, in the year 392 A.D. The pope was replying to a letter from the bishops of Thessalonica, in which they had referred the objections of Bonosus for an authoritative decision. He wrote:

Your Holiness is rightly repelled by the idea that any other birth should have taken place from the womb whence Christ was born according to the flesh. Jesus would not have chosen to be born of a virgin if he had had to regard her as being so little continent as to desecrate the place of birth of the Lord's body, that temple of the eternal King, by human intercourse. If anyone believes that, he sides with the Jews in their unbelief, who say that he could not have been born of a virgin.

Apart from Jerome and Ambrose, other great names also proclaimed the perpetual virginity of Mary, among them, Origen, Augustine and Epiphanius. And the great Cappadocian Father, Basil, goes so far as to declare: "The friends of Christ do not tolerate hearing that the Mother of God ever ceased to be a virgin."

That, in barest outline, is the historical development for the perpetual virginity of Mary.

I am aware that the type of listener to whom this talk is addressed is less interested in history than in having Scriptural texts to prove a particular doctrine. There is also the belief with this type of person that history has been there to be manipulated, and as such it is unreliable, or at best, it must be approached with caution.

But, as I have indicated in earlier talks, this attitude stems from a Bible-only mentality, that in itself, has little to recommend it, since it refuses to accept the authority that pronounced on the Bible and told us which books are to be accepted as inspired and which ones are to be rejected.

Strictly speaking, the Marian doctrines I have examined in this section are outside the immediate scope of the New Testament. They belong to later generations of Christians who had had time to come to grips with the great Christological truths and had seen that there were **other** related answers to be obtained when the earlier controversies were finally settled.

So while the questions themselves may have originated as a result of the meager information given to us by the Gospel writers, it was not until the fourth and fifth centuries that the Church addressed itself to the theological issues that these questions raised.

They are **not** unimportant; nor are they to be dismissed as irrelevant. They are actually **part** of the Christological truths, and help to shed further light on the mysteries of our faith.

I said at the start of this question that I hoped to show that the perpetual virginity of Mary was firmly grounded

in Scripture and history. I hope that from the little I have said, that the truth-seeking Christian will see that there are grounds for a re-consideration of the evidence, and the way in which the doctrine developed from Sacred Scripture.

I pointed out that there is no real objection to the virgin birth of Jesus among professing Christians. But this in itself, is not entirely true. What many non-Catholic Christians really mean when they speak of the virgin birth is the virginal **conception** of Jesus. Very few believe that Mary maintained her virginity during the actual birth of Jesus.

The words "She gave birth to her first-born son" (Lk 2:7), would indicate a normal birth process, but the teaching is that Mary remained a virgin **during** and **after** the birth of Jesus.

The early Fathers saw some of the more obscure texts fulfilled in Mary. These are the Old Testament passages which have some allusion to birth, or virginity, and we speak of them as "types" or "typical" texts when they have been used in this manner by New Testament or early Christian writers.

One of these texts refers to the wondrous birth of the Messianic people, and some of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church did not hesitate to apply it to Mary:

Before she comes to labor, she gives birth.

Before the pains have come upon her, she safely delivers a male child. (Isa 66:7, used by Irenaeus and John Damascene)

Another text is from Ezekiel, where the prophet is speaking of the restoration of the temple. He was brought back to the outer gate of the sanctuary facing east, but it was

closed, and he goes on to write:

He said to me, 'This gate is to remain closed; it is not to be opened for anyone to enter by it; since the Lord, the God of Israel, has entered by it; it shall remain closed. (Ezek 44:2)

This particular passage was used by Ambrose and Jerome and other early writers. And, in yet another passage, this time from the Song of Songs, Chapter 4:12, the writer speaks of his lover as a "closed garden" and a "sealed fountain" or "well," and this also was used by Jerome to highlight Mary's perpetual virginity.

I emphasize again, that this is not the primary or literal interpretation of these texts, but simply **illustrations** that were drawn from them to highlight particular teachings or truths. But also notice, that Mary's virginity during **and after** the birth of Jesus was accepted, and being taught by the early Fathers and writers. There was no objection to the teaching that Mary was "ever-Virgin."

Perhaps the most-important textual witness to Mary's perpetual virginity has been that of Luke 1:34, which I quoted earlier, where Mary replied to the angel, "How can this be, since I have no relations with man." But the question is, can we continue to draw from this reply that Mary had chosen to remain a virgin?

We know from the story of Jephthah's daughter in the Book of Judges that the Israelites did not attach any great religious value to virginity (cf. Jdgs 12:37). And the first thought that springs to mind is that as Mary was **already** betrothed to Joseph, it would seem that she fully intended to

consummate her marriage with him. This would be the normal expectation of their engagement.

The verse from Luke has caused no end of interpretation, especially in Catholic theology, where every effort has been made to draw from it some sort of hidden undertones of Mary's intention to remain a virgin.

But it would seem that in many cases that this was reading more into the verse than was really there. Luke's account is more concerned with the past and the present than with the future. The words "Since I have no relations with a man," are best understood as referring to the past or to the present; or perhaps the past and **up to** the present, which would give us the meaning "since I **have had** no relations with a man," indicating Mary's virginity up to the time of the angelic visit. **In this sense**, there is no room for some **future** intention to remain in a virginal state.

Luke 1:34 may or may not have the intensity of meaning that Catholic interpretation applies to it now, or has applied to it in the past. And it **may be** that the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is **implied** in her remark to the angel, or that the implication has come about only as a result of a later theological reflection on her words. But the doctrine itself remains an article of faith of the Christian Church, and was proclaimed as such at a general council more than fourteen hundred years ago.

Christians today, who do not accept the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity are placed in the position of questioning their reasons for denying the teaching. There are those who deny it simply on the grounds that it is a Catholic teaching, and that as such, it must be rejected as heretical, or at least, highly suspect.

But the real question is, when did it become a **Catholic** teaching? It was not yesterday; nor a century ago; nor has it come into existence only since the Reformation. Its roots go back to the Sixth Century, to the year 553 A.D., to the Second Council of Constantinople, when there was only **ONE** Church; when the East and the West were still united; and the doctrine was accepted as an article of faith, to be believed by all the faithful.

This was a **thousand** years before the Reformation even began; at a time when most Christians today believe in a single line of descent, and identify themselves with Christians living in this period. And, if there is no identification with the past, whence comes the authority today?

The question must then be, Was the Christian Church in error then? And, if not, Why isn't the doctrine accepted today?

I have asked this type of question in earlier talks, and I ask it again now. Has the Church fallen into error? And, if it has, I ask, **WHEN?**

When did the Church fall into error? Where is the true Church today? Where is Christ's promise to be with his Church until the end of time?

These are questions that demand answers, and sincere professing Christians should not be satisfied until the questions **have** been answered and answered with no doubt remaining.

I am not trying to raise smoke screens or cloud the issue, but every truth is important, otherwise it is not truth.

We are not at liberty to pick and choose between truth. We can not, for example, say that the Church's teaching on the Trinity is true, but its teaching on the Virgin Mary is false.

I am aware that doctrinal formulations usually capture

only one or two aspects of a revealed truth and can seldom exhaust it, but the truth **is** there, whether whole or part, and Christians of the time, accept it **as** truth.

It is the same with the teaching on the Virgin Mary. The Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D, the Fifth **General** Council of the Christian Church, issued 14 Canons against the false teachings of heretics of the day. Canon Two states:

If any one does not confess that there are two begettings of God the Word, one before ages from the Father, timelessly and incorporeally; the other in the last days, the begetting of the same person, who came down from heaven and was made flesh of the holy and glorious God-bearer and **ever-virgin** Mary, and was born of her, let him be Anathema.

Mary's unique position is again spoken of in the sixth Canon:

If any one applies the title 'God-Bearer' [**Theotokos**] to the glorious and **ever-virgin** Mary in an unreal and not in a true sense, as if a mere man was born, and not God the Word made flesh and born of her, while the birth is to be 'referred' to God the Word, as they say inasmuch as he was **with** the Man who was born - let him be Anathema.

The title "Ever-Virgin" as applied to Mary, may not stem **directly** from the Bible. There may not be sufficient Scriptural evidence to back up such a teaching. But the early Church Fathers were able to draw **fine threads** from the Scripture

fabric to show how such a tradition developed in the formative years of the Christian Church.

#### Part B of the Question: Who Were the "Brothers" of Jesus?

The problems associated with the "Brethren" of the Lord are less real than imagined; and Jehovah's Witnesses offer nothing new in their revival of these ancient objections to Mary's perpetual virginity.

Altogether, some twelve texts can be cited that make specific mention of the brothers of Jesus, and though it may be difficult to determine the precise relationship between Jesus and his "brothers," the problem is not insurmountable.

From an historical point of view, it is well to notice that in the first three centuries of the Christian era, the only doubts cast on Mary's perpetual virginity were those raised by Tertullian.

Unfortunately, this former champion of orthodoxy broke away from the teaching authority of the Church, and in his later years adopted heretical views on many points of doctrine.

Speaking of Tertullian's teaching on the virginity of Mary, the translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible, Jerome, said: "Of Tertullian, I need say nothing more than that he was not a son of the Church."

Tertullian's opinions are his own, and do not reflect the teaching of the Church, which has constantly expressed its

belief in the perpetual virginity of Mary.

The first serious opposition to Mary's title of Ever-Virgin, which would later be bestowed on her by the Fifth General Council held at Constantinople in 553 A.D., came from an otherwise unknown Helvidius. To him must go the dubious distinction of being the first to propose all the now-common objections Jehovah's Witnesses raise against the perpetual virginity of Mary. Although Helvidius, and a contemporary named Jovinian, were both effectively silenced by Jerome, their errors continue to appear from time to time in modern dress; but the arguments used to demolish them 16 centuries ago are the same arguments that silence them today.

After carefully considering the **whole** question of the "brothers" of Jesus, Jerome and other Christian writers were led to suggest that these "brothers" should be regarded as cousins.

Jehovah's Witnesses are quick to point out that the Greek language has a word for cousins, which the New Testament writers would have used if this had been the degree of relationship intended. And in putting forward this proposal they mistakenly believe they have discovered a vital point that has never occurred to other critics before them.

However, as I mentioned in a previous talk on the Papacy, it should be borne in mind that most of the New Testament writers were Jews, who wrote in Greek but thought in Hebrew - or, more correctly, Aramaic, which was the common language of the Jews of the day. Evidence of the Semitic background can be seen throughout the New Testament, where it is common to find the writers using words and expressions that are distinctly Semitic in origin.

It is well known that the Hebrew language had no word

for "Cousin," and that the use of "brother" often included degrees of relationship outside the immediate family.

In this way, Abraham called Lot his "brother" (cf. Gen 13:8), whereas the context reveals that Lot was his nephew.

Later, in the same book, Laban called Jacob his "brother" (cf. Gen 29:15), although it is apparent that he was Jacob's uncle.

When Eleazar died, "leaving no sons, only daughters," and their "brothers" married them (cf. 1 Chron 22:23), we again conclude from the context, and which is borne out in many modern translations, that the "brothers" were actually **kinsmen** (cf. also a similar reference to "kinsmen" in Leviticus 10:4).

In the case of the "brothers" of Jesus, it is quite possible that Hebrew usage has been carried over into the Greek, and though "brother" has been retained as the literal translation of the Hebrew or Aramaic equivalent, "cousin" or "kinsman" is the actual meaning intended.

Accepting that Hebrew usage of "brother" includes varying degrees of kinship, we can proceed to an examination of the "brothers" of Christ.

Jehovah's witnesses say in their book, **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, that Mary bore other children after Jesus (cf. p. 330), but the fact is that **NOWHERE** in the Bible does it say that Mary had other children. It is noteworthy that the "brethren" are never called the children of Mary - Jesus alone is designated as her Son.

Mary is called the "Mother of Jesus" (Jn 2:1); the "Mother of the Lord" (Lk 1:43); "his mother" (Mt 1:18; 2:11, 13, 20; 12:46; 13:55). Mark 6:3, speaks of Jesus as "**THE** son of Mary" (that is, with the definite article), thereby intimating that he was the **only** son of Mary.

Normal Jewish custom called a man the son of his father, whether or not the father was still alive. So Mark's expression may reflect his own faith that God is the Father of Jesus.

The Rationalist philosopher, Joseph Renan, who died in 1892, had been of the opinion that Jesus was the first of a number of children of Mary, but after reflecting on the implication of Mark's words, he changed his mind, saying that a person wrote this way only when there were no other children.

Of the four "brothers" of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, two of these, James and Joseph appear as children of **another** Mary (Mt 27:56), whom John identifies in his Gospel as the wife of Clopas (Jn 19:25). She is mentioned as the sister of Jesus' mother. As it would be highly unlikely to have two sisters with the same name, it would seem that they were related in another manner - possibly, but not certainly, as Jerome suggested, as sisters-in-law. This would make her children cousins of Jesus. The other two brothers, Simon and Jude, could also be explained in the same way.

The fact remains, that in many such relationships, it is no longer possible to reconstruct the exact degree of relationship intended; and quite often, Catholic, and Protestant scholars - and Jehovah's Witnesses, are clutching at straws - and tradition, in an effort to identify the people who appear in the Bible.

The most significant text against the brethren of the Lord is that of John 19:26-27, where we are told that while dying on the cross of Calvary, Jesus committed his mother to the care of the "beloved disciple," John.

Throughout the public ministry of Jesus, his "brothers" have the care of Mary and accompany her on her travels (cf.

Mt 12:46; Lk 8:19). In view of the close family ties amongst the Jews, if these "brothers" were her own children, they would be the logical ones to continue caring for her after the death of Jesus. But such was not the case.

Christ's actions in commending Mary to the care of John is unintelligible if she had other children to care for her.

One more point to be noticed is that when one studies the Gospel accounts of the attitude of these "brothers," they clearly behave as if they were older than Jesus; whereas, he was the "first-born" (cf. Lk 2:7).

Jehovah's Witnesses have used this term "first-born" to imply that Jesus was but the first of a number of children born to Mary (cf. **MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS**, p. 330), whereas the term does not lend itself to this interpretation at all.

From the Old Testament (cf. such texts as Gen 27:33-37; Ex 13:2; 22:19; Deut 21:15-17, and elsewhere), we learn that the "first-born" male child had certain rights and privileges, and the use of this phrase in Luke 2:7 is restricted to this legal sense.

The application of the term "first-born" to Jesus also has Messianic overtones, and identifies him with the blessed Son spoken of by the Psalmist (cf. Ps 2:7, and Heb 1:5-6). It is also a reminder to us of Mary's virginity up to the time of the birth of Jesus.

The general tradition of the Church has **always** been that Mary remained a virgin **after** the birth of Jesus. Her body had been the temple where the Word of God had taken flesh, and, like the temple mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel, which I spoke of a little earlier, the gate through which the Lord had once entered (Ezek 43:4) was closed, and would never again be opened

(Ezek 44:2).

In the light of the awe-inspiring dignity bestowed on a human being, it has ever been the teaching of the Christian Church that Mary retained her virginity until her death. As the famous Fourth Century Bishop Basil remarked: "The friends of Christ do not tolerate hearing that the Mother of God ever ceased to be a virgin."

The story of the "brothers" of the Lord does pose some problems, but these are not insoluble. And, to repeat again, those who persist in denying Mary the title of **Theotokos**; who refuse to admit she was conceived without the stain of original sin; and who insist that her awareness of the tremendous dignity bestowed on her by Almighty God did not lead her to embrace a life of continency, are flying in the face of the facts.

The whole question of Mary's role in the Plan of Salvation needs to be carefully re-examined, for the issue has been clouded by centuries of controversy that has nothing to do with true Christianity; and true Christianity has always recognized Mary's unique position among the elect of God.

The Witnesses' attitude toward Mariology is seen to be the typical Protestant reaction carried to its extreme limits. They are under the false impression that any honor given to the Virgin Mary is a form of worship forbidden by God, and which must be resisted to the bitter end. They fail to realize that whatever honor Christians give to Mary can never approach the honor that God himself bestowed on her by choosing her to be the mother of his Son.

This is the end of my presentation of the three doctrines I chose for this particular section, and it brings to an end this series of talks.

Throughout this series I have sought to be objective and to have regard for the beliefs and feelings of those I have spoken about. I have no wish to condemn Jehovah's Witnesses of anyone else for what they believe. I approached the series with the complete and utter conviction that what I believe is the truth; and I can scarcely do otherwise. I know that there are people out there hearing this tape who will have the same conviction that what they have is the truth, and that what they believe will be totally opposed to what I have presented here.

All I can do is to invite such people to weigh the evidence I have presented here, and if, at the end of their examination they still have the same conviction, then I can only urge them to stay as they are and to continue to serve God in their own way.

I said at the start of this series that many people will be hearing the case for Catholicism presented, perhaps, for the first time. I may, or may not have presented it in the best possible manner, but I have sought to present it accurately and logically, and in the final analysis, any error or omission is my responsibility.

My invitation at the end of each talk has been for listeners to contact me if they have further questions or criticisms, comments or suggestions; and now, at the end of this series I again give this invitation with even more fervor.

I am ready to discuss any remarks or statements I have made, and I am willing to enter into correspondence with

anyone who seeks further information.

If I have offended anyone by what I have said, it was not intended. This series was not motivated by malice, but simply as a further expression of the interest I have in Jehovah's Witnesses, and in all who follow the Lord by a different road to myself.

My prayer is that all roads will lead us to the One in whom we put our trust.

I thank you for your kind attention.